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Representations of language acquisition and literacy in contemporary literature

REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LITERACY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

Representations of language acquisition and literacy often find their way into literary texts. They tell compelling stories of conflict, desire, pain and success set against recognisable historical backgrounds. When they are discussed from a literary standpoint, they can help us understand the social dynamics whereby we become language users and literate beings. Nevertheless, they are often overlooked by literary critics or interpreted via frameworks that produce reductive interpretations. This thesis synthesises research on literary representations of language acquisition and literacy and puts forward a new theoretical framework called the "literacy narrative approach". The literacy narrative approach conceptualises language acquisition and literacy as situated practices which coexist with other semiotic modes and is designed to help students of literature and literary critics articulate the epistemological potential of literary texts that address these issues. This thesis tests the literacy narrative approach by applying it to three contemporary literary texts. The practical applications suggest that, through this approach, we can revise the way in which the text has been received, look at language acquisition and literacy in a different way and delineate a new area of research within literary theory and criticism.

Dedication and Acknowledgments

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Author’s declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the *University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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INTRODUCTION

In *De l'éducation d'un homme sauvage* (1801/2012), Jean Itard chronicles the education of Victor of Aveyron. Victor was a "feral child", a child who had grown up in the wilderness, deprived of human socialisation. He was first sighted in the forests of post-revolutionary France in 1797 and then captured in Aveyron in 1800 (Itard 1801/2012: 16-17; Newton 2002: 98-99). The boy, who was around twelve, had a long scar on his neck dating from when he was about four years of age, which suggested that his throat had been cut before being left in the woods to die (Itard 1801/2012: 21; Newton 2002: 99). Victor was unable to socialise, he did not seem to have a sense of self as a human being and was deprived of speech. He could produce sounds but not intelligible language, nor was he able to understand its significance (Itard 1801/2012: 19-20; Newton 2002: 99-100). All those who first examined him concurred that the boy was either a "lunatic" or someone who had lost all traces of humanity due to his long isolation. The only exception was Jean Itard.

Itard was a young physician and a disciple of the famous professor Pinel, the doctor who had introduced "la médicine morale" (moral medicine) in France, i.e. the humane treatment of the mentally ill (Itard 1801/2012: 22; Newton 2002: 103). Itard believed that Victor could be taught to socialise and to speak. Moreover, he saw an incredible opportunity. The boy could refute the theory of the "noble savage" popularised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and harnessed by the French Revolution. Rousseau argued that humans were corrupted by society (Itard 1801/2012: 13; Newton 2002: 106). By educating Victor, Itard could argue that the "noble savage" was untenable. Without society, we will all be like Victor, unable to speak and unable to socialise (Itard 1801/2012: 17; Newton 2002: 112-113). Moreover, he could test the theories of a philosopher he greatly admired, Étienne de Condillac, who maintained that identity stems from mastery of language, understood as a system of words (Itard 1801/2012: 14, 46; Newton 2002: 108).

The post-revolutionary French government put the boy under Itard's care. Itard named him and, with the help of a nurse, taught him to socialise and instructed him in the French language. Since his capture, Victor had already started to develop an effective mode of communication which Itard (following Condillac) called a "langage d'action", a language

of actions and bodily gestures. However, for the doctor, this was not enough (Itard 1801/2012: 46). Victor had to become familiar with both speech and literacy – reading and writing. Therefore, he taught him to recognise and produce both spoken and written words.

Victor found learning to speak extremely difficult (Itard 1801/2012: 54-57) but lessons geared to literacy would trigger fits of anger and frustration to which Itard responded with discipline and punishment. Discovering that the boy was afraid of heights, Itard would take him close to high windows, using fear to assert his will (1801/2012: 54-55). Victor made very slow but steady progress (Itard 1801/2012: 33), which Itard recorded in *De l'éducation* and which gained him European renown (Newton 2002: 127). However, after a few years, progress stalled and, in 1810, Itard abandoned the project, leaving the boy under the care of his nurse (Newton 2002: 127). At the end of his education, Victor could only pronounce a few isolated words and compose the word "lait" (milk) with cut-out letters (Newton 2002: 125).

Although *De l'éducation* was written over two hundred years ago in response to Rousseau's and Condillac's theories, it is still topical. It was revisited by François Truffaut who adapted it for the screen in 1969 with the title *L'enfant sauvage* (*Wild Child*), and by Michael Newton who rewrote it in his book *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (2002). Between 1970 and 1971, *L'enfant sauvage* was screened for the psychologists, linguists and doctors involved in the education of a modern-day feral child, Genie (Newton 2002: 216-217). Genie was discovered in California in 1970. She had spent the first thirteen years of her life confined to one room and strapped to a potty, a chair or a bed. If she made any noise whatsoever, her father would beat her. She was rarely fed and never spoken to (Newton 2002: 208-229). Like Victor, she was deprived of speech.[1] Truffaut's film was considered by the researchers as a valuable source of insights into Genie's case: "The entire drama of their potential relationship with the girl was there already set out for them. It had all happened before, nearly two hundred years ago, and the trajectory of their future involvement seemed mapped out before them in the past" (2002: 217).

[1] Although both Victor and Genie are usually classed as "feral children", there is a vast difference between them. Genie was subjected to daily psychological and physical abuse by her father and brother. During his time in the wilderness, Victor had a degree of freedom and we can assume he was not abused by other human beings. Therefore, Genie would be better described as a "victim of abuse".

As Newton explains, there is an ongoing fascination in Western societies and beyond with feral children (2002: 1-15). Besides being a source of extraordinary stories, such children raise compelling questions about the essence of humanity and, in particular, about the relation between humanity, identity and language. Yet, there is more to their stories than issues of language, humanity and identity. *De l'éducation*, *L'enfant sauvage* and Newman's book also contain explicit representations of language acquisition, of the dynamics whereby we become language users. These works highlight the extent to which language does not emerge out of a vacuum (language is not inherent in Victor) but is determined by social processes of teaching and learning. Concomitantly, they highlight the extent to which language acquisition is centred on literacy – learning to read and write. Whenever the theme of language appears, representations of language acquisition and literacy are never far behind.

In this thesis, I argue that interpreting them is the means whereby we can fully understand works which, at first sight, are merely about language. Put differently, interpreting works about language without engaging representations of language acquisition and literacy only leads to reductive interpretations. Therefore, in this thesis, I formulate a theoretical framework geared to this type of representation which I will refer to as the "literacy narrative approach" and which I will test via three case studies. In what follows I explain the main features of the literacy narrative approach, the structure of the thesis and why the literacy narrative approach can alter how we look at language acquisition and literacy. After that, I outline the rationale underlying the case studies and how this approach informs the reception of the texts discussed.

1.The literacy narrative approach and thesis structure

The theoretical framework that I expound in this thesis and that I will refer to as the "literacy narrative approach" can be applied to representations of first and second language acquisition, to different genres (e.g. fiction, non-fiction, poetry) and, with the necessary modifications, to different media and cultural artefacts (e.g. films, visual arts, literary texts). However, in this thesis, I focus on literature for two reasons. Firstly, literature, more than any other media, engages literacy on multiple levels. From its own materiality to the identity of its author, a literary text is inescapably tied to literacy. A literary text is, traditionally, a

print object made up of written words which originates from the author's own socialisation in literacy. There would be neither literature nor writers without learning to read and write. The same cannot be said so categorically of, say, visual arts. A painting, or an illustration, do not presuppose literacy instruction on part of the artist, nor do they necessarily include writing and/or print. Regarding films, these often engage both literacy and language acquisition via representation. *L'enfant sauvage* is one such example, but there are others.[2] For instance, in the blockbuster romantic comedy *Legally Blonde* (2001), the protagonist, Elle Woods, learns the specialised language of criminal law at Harvard; in *Io no spik inglish* (1995), an Italian comedy starring Paolo Villaggio, a middle-aged man decides to enrol on an intensive English course in Oxford in order not to lose his job. Furthermore, cinema is tied to literacy because film production depends on the reading and writing of texts such as scripts and subtitles. Nevertheless, a film's materiality draws primarily on the semiotic modes of moving image and oral language/speech, rather than written language. It is literature, therefore, due to its intrinsic relation to literacy instruction and language-based semiotic modes such as print/writing that fully exemplifies the different ways in which the literacy narrative approach can be applied.

Secondly, literature has a longstanding tradition of representations which explicitly weld language acquisition to literacy. There are texts in which such representations are embedded in a narrative that foregrounds other issues. For instance, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/2010), which is known as a satire and a children's book about fantastical lands, contains several passages in which Gulliver recounts how he learned to speak, read and write the languages of the lands he explored (1726/2010: 33-34, 44). There are also texts in which language acquisition and literacy take centre stage. In the widely read autobiography *Lost in Translation* (1989/1991), Eva Hoffman describes how she learned English as a second language when she emigrated from Poland to Canada in the 1960s, her love of books and writing (1989/1991: 26-29, 135), and her studies, which began in a Polish primary school (1989/1991: 35) and culminated at Harvard (1989/1991: 200-201).

[2] In my research, I have only been able to locate one study of representations of literacy in films: *Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy* (2007) by Bronwyn Williams and Amy Zenger. This book, however, does not consider the intrinsic relation between literacy and language learning which undergirds this thesis.

Although literacy and language acquisition often find their way into literature, their significance has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Since the early 1990s, a few scholars have attempted to formulate frameworks for this type of representation, but their works have not impacted literary studies and criticism at large and cannot be said to constitute a recognisable field of study. In Chapter 1, therefore, I bring together and taxonomise their scholarship and offer a model consisting of three approaches – the language learner approach, the translation approach and the literacy narrative approach. I argue that the literacy narrative approach is the most useful because it accounts for more textual elements, which results in more nuanced interpretations. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are practical applications of the literacy narrative approach. Each chapter focusses on a literary text and consists of a comparison between the text's reception and a reading formulated by using the literacy narrative approach. In each chapter, I argue that this approach can enrich the way the text hitherto has been received.

The literacy narrative approach works in the tradition of cultural studies criticism. It views language acquisition and literacy as extra-textual phenomena linked to history; this means that they can only be understood through detailed contextualisation of when, how, and by whom they are practised. Alongside history, this approach considers the relation between language learning, literacy and ideology. Ideology is a word which has many meanings. It is employed in everyday parlance to refer to a set of ideas endorsed by institutions and social groups (e.g. "the ideology of the conservative party"). It is also widely used in academic contexts. It is usually associated with Marx and Engels and *The German Ideology* where it is defined as "false consciousness" (misleading, upside-down world-view) (Marx and Engels 1848/1974: 40, 47). Marx and Engels saw "false consciousness" as a phenomenon stemming from class relations and from the oppression of the working class by capitalists. Subsequently, their definition was enlarged by intellectuals such as Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton and John Thompson to form a line of thought known as "Neo-Marxism" (Street 1993: 8; Janks 2010: 35-37). For Neo-Marxists, ideology still refers to a system of oppression. Thompson, for instance, defines it as a phenomenon "essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power – that is, to the process of maintaining domination" (Thompson 1984: 4). However, ideology/"the process of maintaining domination" stems not just from class but from a larger set of factors which typically include gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, institutions, linguistic and cultural

practices such as literary representation (Rice and Waugh 1996: 51-52). The literacy narrative approach draws from a Neo-Marxist definition of ideology. Language learning and literacy are thus viewed as situated practices that embody societal power struggles and tensions traceable to a complex set of factors. As a theoretical framework for the interpretation of cultural artefacts, the literacy narrative approach establishes links between representation and extra-textual reality and examines how representations challenge and/or reproduce the ideological and historical nature of literacy and language acquisition.

Since the literacy narrative approach sits at the interface of texts, extra-textual reality and literacy, it shares a theoretical and methodological ground with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire argues that the classroom is a social setting that can partake in the reproduction of power structures through "banking education" (1970/1996: 53-56), namely, the teaching of decontextualised knowledge stripped of critical and historical elements: "The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable" (Freire 1970/1996: 52). Against "banking education", Freire advocates a pedagogy geared to developing "*coscientização*", that is, the ability "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Ramos in Freire 1970/1996: 17; Freire 1970/1996: 85). *Coscientização* thus refers to the ability to identify social inequalities and to change them to create a more equal society.

In the 1960s, Freire organised literacy campaigns based on *coscientização* and which targeted the disenfranchised strata of Brazilian society. Broadly speaking, one of his literacy lessons would use "words […] to transform the world" (1970/1996: 69). Lessons would be based on the manipulation of "generative word[s]" (Freire 1976/2001: 624), that is, words which evoke society's power structures and the lived realities of the learners. Freire's pedagogy was very effective: adults would learn to read in three weeks (Daniell 1999: 400) and would regain a sense of themselves as agents in society (Freire 1976/2001: 622).[3] The literacy narrative approach draws from Freire's work because it uses words (in the shape of literary texts) to identify political and ideological inequities in the context of literacy and language acquisition. Although doing this does not bring about tangible changes, it has the potential to do so because, as Freire's pedagogy suggests, it is by

[3] Due to the campaign's empowering effects, in 1964, Brazil's "military *junta* exiled Freire for sixteen years" (Daniell 1999: 400).

analysing how and where inequities are produced that we can start to envisage a more just and positive practice.

The literacy narrative approach also draws on the concept of "literacy practice" put forward by anthropologist and literacy scholar Brian Street. According to Street, literacy is a phenomenon that "varies from context to context" and that always entails more than learning to read and write: "[T]he ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being" (Street 2012: 29). Literacy is always grafted on a specific world-view and specific ways of behaving and interacting with others. "Literacy practice", therefore, refers to the ways in which an individual or a group of individuals deploys literacy in their lives and to the functions and values that they attach to it (Street 1984: 95-129; Street 1993: 7-10; Street 2012: 27-29; see also Baynham and Prinsloo 2009: 2-7; Barton 2009: 39; Purcell-Gates 2010 3-4). Implied in the concept of literacy practice is the idea that literacy is plural and multiple. (There are many litera*cies.*) Furthermore, for Street, "particular versions of literacy are always 'ideological', in the sense that they are always rooted in a particular world-view and a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and marginalise others" (Street 2012: 29). Literacy practices, in other words, are not neutral sets of cognitive skills: some command more prestige and power than others and are implicated in "the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power" (Thompson 1984: 4).

Street's concept of literacy practice does not stem from an overt concern with language acquisition. Nevertheless, since literacy is one of the means whereby we acquire language and is often inextricably linked to it, this concept is applicable to discussions of language acquisition as well. Tellingly, applied linguist Aneta Pavlenko has defined language acquisition in a manner which is similar to Street's definition of literacy practice. For Pavlenko, language acquisition is not a "simple accumulation of skills and knowledge" but "a situated process of participation in particular communities of practice, which may entail the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context" (Pavlenko 2001b: 318-319). Just like literacy, acquiring a language can be viewed as an ideological phenomenon that shapes identity by changing learners according to preestablished social structures which privilege certain ways of being, certain modes of communication, and certain epistemological principles over others.

To sum up: this thesis proposes a framework for the interpretation of representations of language acquisition and literacy called the literacy narrative approach. The literacy narrative approach is based on the contention that whenever the theme of language appears, what is at stake in not *just* language. If we look carefully, representations of language acquisition and literacy are never far behind and the meaning of a text is inextricably linked to them. This approach draws from Freire's *coscientização* and uses the combined lens of history, ideology and Street's concept of literacy practice.

This lens has benefits for criticism. First, it broadens the conceptual map that we bring to a representation. In addition to the well-known nexus between language, humanity, and identity, we can insert representations into their historical contexts, evaluate the role that literacy plays within language learning and identify representations of literacy practices and power struggles. A broader conceptual map can produce more nuanced interpretations of a text because it allows the critic to approach it from a greater variety of standpoints. Second, it reveals the presence of wide variety of texts centred on this theme, which resituates language acquisition and literacy as significant literary preoccupations. Third, since language acquisition and literacy are extra-textual phenomena, this lens can help us understand the role that they play in our lives, the social dynamics that undergird them and why language is often aligned with identity and power. In short, the combined lens of history, ideology and of literacy practice can turn representations into epistemological tools.

For instance, if we consider *De l'éducation* and its adaptations through the lens of language, identity, and humanity alone, we may be inclined to frame Itard as a progressive and enlightened doctor who takes it upon himself to rebuild Victor's identity as a human by using language. Within such a framework, Victor's linguistic education is inevitable and, more importantly, an unquestionable asset. If we use the literacy narrative approach, we will focus on ideology and the power struggles between Victor and Itard. As explained earlier, literacy lessons caused Victor to have fits of anger to which Itard responded by exploiting the boy's fear of heights (Itard 1801/2012: 54-57). In Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage*, fear of heights is replaced by fear of *"*le cabinet noir*"* (the dark closet), in which Victor is briefly locked for refusing to arrange cut-out letters according to Itard's instructions (1969: 1h 02′ 12″). If we focus on these scenes, we begin to see Itard not just as a progressive doctor but also a narrow-minded teacher who neglects Victor's vulnerability to pursue his own pedagogical interests. Victor had already survived attempted infanticide and, quite

possibly, abuse; moreover, after his capture, he spent some time in a Paris hospital where he became a sort of circus attraction for those who wanted to see what "a noble savage" was like (Itard 1801/2012: 230). Why did the doctor inflict more trauma through the acquisition of language (understood as a verbal semiotic mode)?

Figure 1 Itard (played by François Truffaut) teaches Victor (played by Jean-Pierre Cargol) to arrange cut-out letters.[4]

The clash between Victor's vulnerability and Itard's pedagogy, in turn, raises compelling questions about literacy: What drove Itard's determination to make Victor not just a language user but a literate being notwithstanding his pupil's obvious difficulties? Why was Victor's own language of gestures not worth developing as a semiotic mode for communication? These questions have the potential to highlight further interpretive paths. We can start, for example, to become aware that language is a semiotic mode which interacts with other semiotic modes, a phenomenon which social semioticians call "multimodality" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Kress 2010). Multimodality and the coexistence of various semiotic modes also suggest that Itard's predilection for language and literacy is contingent (rather than universal) and, therefore, related to history and patterns of human socialisation.

Representations of literacy are catalysts for thought-provoking questions because literacy has a particularly strong connection with ideology. Unlike other aspects of language acquisition (e.g. speech, orality, pronunciation, prosody), learning to read and write is largely dependent on formal and conscious instruction at the hand of specialists working for

[4] Source: *L'enfant sauvage* (1969: 1h 02' 39")

institutions (e.g. education and health systems). Neo-Marxist critic Louis Althusser included public and private schools in his definition of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs), that is, the social structures and systems that ensure the perpetuation of ideology (1969/1996: 53-55). Interestingly, the word "education", which often appears in conjunction with literacy, comes from the Latin *ex ducere* which means "to lead someone out of somewhere". Implied in this etymology is the idea of rebirth and liberation but also of forced displacement. Education and, by extension, literacy can be empowering experiences, but they may also take you where you did not want to go and change who you are in the process. (Victor tried to escape several times. Was he happier in the Aveyron forest?). Interpreting representations of language acquisition should always be informed by an interpretation of representations of literacy because it is in literacy that ideology manifests itself more forcefully.

2. The rationale of the case studies and the benefits of the literacy narrative approach

The literary texts discussed in the central chapters of this thesis are very different. They belong to different genres; they were composed by authors who come from different sociocultural backgrounds and they accord representations of language learning and literacy a different status within the overall economy of the text. In Chapter 2, I discuss *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982/2004), a collection of autobiographical essays by Richard Rodriguez. Rodriguez is a high-profile Mexican-American cultural critic who was born into a family of Chicanos (U.S.-born, U.S. citizens of Mexican descent living in the U.S.) and who, until the age of six, spoke exclusively Spanish. Chapter 3 is about *Nuova grammatica finlandese* (2000/2012) (*New Finnish Grammar*), a novel by Diego Marani, a polyglot Italian novelist and an E.U. cultural advisor. Chapter 4 discusses *Terra matta* (2007) (*Mad Land*), an autobiography by Vincenzo Rabito, a Sicilian peasant who did not go to school and who taught himself to read and write. While in *Hunger of Memory* and *Nuova grammatica finlandese* language learning and literacy are central themes, in *Terra matta*, they are ancillary to the main narrative. I have chosen difference as a rationale in order to test the transferability of the framework. The more different the texts are, the higher the potential relevance of the framework for literary studies and criticism. These differences

notwithstanding, the texts share commonalities. They are all about alphabetic literacy and they were composed between the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century in the West. Moreover, they draw on a literacy practice that is widely used in many parts of the world and that can be defined as dominant. Therefore, one of the goals of my case studies is to discuss how the texts represent this practice and how they inform our understanding of it.

As Jenny Cook-Gumperz has noted: "Since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been unquestionably assumed that literacy is both the purpose and the product of schooling" (2006: 19). Seminal ethnographic studies of literacy (e.g. Scribner and Cole 1981; Street 1984) have shown that, in developing societies, it is possible to have literacy without schooling, but "to have schooling without literacy is not possible" (Cook-Gumperz 2006: 47). Similarly, David Olson has argued that literacy has been both the medium and the goal of schooling in Western and non-Western societies alike (Olson 1977: 270-271). Education systems have become the engine and the hallmark of literacy and, by extension, of language learning. In the classroom, language learning and literacy are usually grafted on the standard, grammatically correct variety of national languages and involve the use of print material. Ways of using reading and writing which do not carry this hallmark are likely to be branded as "illiteracy", regardless of whether they actually involve reading and writing (Janks 2010: 2-3, 39; Street 2012: 38).

This correlation can be expanded to include other, less tangible, elements. As social historian Harvey Graff has argued, we are surrounded by a "literacy myth", the idea that literacy always leads to economic development, political empowerment, upward social mobility, enhanced cognition and moral enlightenment (1979: 2-19; 2013: 6). Literacy, for instance, is considered so important that, in 1975, UNESCO declared it a human right (Bataille 1976). Ideas such as the literacy myth are accompanied by a specific rhetoric which, according to psychologist Sylvia Scribner, consists of metaphors expressing "power", "adaptation" (social participation) and a "state of grace" (1984).

Nevertheless, as the word "myth" suggests, literacy does not always deliver its promises (Scribner 1984: 6-9; Graff 2013: 35-47). The literacy myth exists "apart from and beyond empirical evidence that might clarify the actual functions, meanings and effects of reading and writing" (Graff 2013: 6). Literacy is a complex practice characterised by discontinuities and contradictions:

> Social attributes (including ascribed characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, and social class) and historical contexts, which are shaped by time and place, mediate literacy's impacts […]. Literacy's links with economic development are both direct and indirect, multiple and contradictory. For example, its value to skilled artisans may differ radically from its import to unskilled workers. Literacy levels sometimes rise as an effect rather than a cause of industrialisation. Industrialisation may depress literacy levels through its negative impact on schooling chances for the young, while over a longer term its contribution may be more positive. (Graff 2013: 9)

Notwithstanding these discontinuities, the literacy myth and the metaphors that accompany it have become an integral part of current conceptualisations of literacy. Therefore, they can be placed alongside standard language, grammar, print and the classroom.

We are now so used to these correlations that it is difficult to envisage any of their terms without the others. Nevertheless, it is important to remind ourselves that literacy is contextually determined. As, we have seen, it is what Brian Street calls a "social practice" (Street 1984: 104; Street 1993:10-11), a phenomenon that can be harnessed by human beings in different ways and for different reasons. As Scribner has noted: "[I]ndividuals in societies without writing systems do not become literate" (1984: 7). Even societies that have a writing system were once oral (illiterate?) societies. Alphabetic literacy is, in fact, an invention dating from 700-600 BCE (Havelock 1982: 82; Graff 1987: 8-9; Olson 1995/2001: 117; Thomas 2009: 346-347). Furthermore, there was a time when the literacy myth was not a dominant construct. In *Phaedrus* (*c.*370 BCE), Plato (through the words of Socrates) claims that orality is the way forward and that literacy only has negative effects. It weakens memory and cannot ensure correct understanding because the author/writer is separate from the text and is not there to answer the reader's questions (Gee 1987: 200; Graff 1987: 24; Gee 1990/2008: 51-56; Harris 2009: 47-50).

Dominant conceptualisations of literacy are the result of a historical conjuncture that took place in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century has played such a crucial role in shaping current understandings of literacy that Graff has referred to it as the "origins of our times" (Graff 1987: 260-372). During the nineteenth century, emergent nation-states organised mass literacy campaigns via centralised education systems. These systems consisted mainly of secular public schools. Although access to schooling was still influenced by geographical location, age, class, gender, race and ethnicity (Graff 2013: 75), mass literacy campaigns made literacy accessible to larger segments of the population and, in particular, to the lower classes (Arnove and Graff 1987: 23-24; Cook-Gumperz 2006: 31-33). In school, learning to read and write was grafted onto the standard, grammatically correct, form of the nation's official language/s and involved print (Arnove and Graff 1987: 24).

Imparting standard language to the masses was essential both for nation-building and industrial development (Graff 1987: 321; Cook-Gumperz 2006: 36). As Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities*, state institutions needed a vernacular that cut across regional varieties for bureaucracy and as an identity marker symbolising belonging to the newly-formed nation (1983/2016: 40-43). Industrial capitalists, for their part, needed a workforce who understood simple print/written instruction but, above all, a workforce who had already learned discipline, obedience and punctuality in the classroom (Graff 1979: 227-228). The literacy myth and metaphors of empowerment consolidated themselves in this period and were instrumental in ensuring the success of nation-building and industrialisation. Nineteenth-century mass literacy campaigns thus forged and reinforced a complex correlation which included concrete items (literacy, the masses, standard language, grammar, print, schools, the state) and abstract concepts (the literacy myth, metaphors of power, of social participation, of a state of grace).

This correlation still stands today, but before the nineteenth century other paradigms were available. While nowadays education is often compulsory and very few would deny the masses access to literacy (at least in principle), in mid-eighteenth-century England, literacy was associated with the upper classes:

> [I]t was common to view writing and reading as one of a gentleman's noblest pastimes. […]. It was what Bourdieu would

> have called a “clubby habitus”, shared by that smallest fragment of the population that happened to have enough education to participate and enough time and money to indulge. (Brockmeier and Olson 2009: 3)

Moreover, in England, Sweden and Scotland, members of the clergy and of the government considered teaching the poor and the working classes to read and write as dangerous. Literacy, they argued, would make the proletariat unfit for manual work and discontented with their position, which could lead to social unrest (Graff 1987: 225, 239, 247; Graff 2013: 101-102).

Before the mid-eighteenth century and elsewhere, we can find more paradigms. In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German cities, wealthy merchants and artisans founded private secular schools to teach the clerical uses of reading, writing and arithmetic (Gawthrop 1987: 34). In the sixteenth century, most of these schools were taken over by Catholic and Protestant churches, making schooling and literacy a vehicle for religious doctrines (Gawthrop 1987:33-34). Sixteenth-century Protestant schools were remarkable in their time since they embarked on an unprecedented effort to impart literacy to the masses and, in particular, children (Gawthrop 1987: 31; Graff 1987: 137-138). However, for the lower classes, literacy instruction was restricted to reading and did not include writing (Graff 1987: 141).

Eighteenth-century Sweden had a home-based, compulsory, education system organised by the Lutheran Church. A 1723 royal decree obliged parents and carers to teach children to read and study the Catechism (Johansson 1987: 73-74). Failure to comply led to fines, which were used for “the instruction of poor children in the parish” (Johansson 1987: 73). Mothers played a very important educational role so that, in early modern Sweden, an “exceptional pattern of women’s rates of literacy paralleling men’s was achieved” (Arnove and Graff 1987: 10). In Russia, after the abolition of serfdom in 1861, an unusual practice emerged. While the Empire set up a formal school networks for children and the armed services (Eklof 1987: 124), millions of adult peasants, spurred on by release from bondage, “set up informal [and illegal] villages schools (*volnye shkoly*) taught by itinerant […] priests, or retired soldiers, and funded either by payments from individual households or by the entire commune” (Eklof 1987: 124-125).

This brief excursion into nineteenth-century Russia and pre-nineteenth-century Europe suggests that the correlation between language learning, literacy, mass schooling and the literacy myth has not been consistent across time and space. Literacy used to be thought of as dangerous when in the hands of the masses and did not always include a symmetrical balance between reading and writing (readers were not always writers). Literacy and language acquisition could be home-based, they could be imparted to children as well as to adults, they could be taught by mothers and be the privilege of the wealthy. Schools could be set up by the church and peasants and not just by the state.

One constant across these variations is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "the centripetal forces of the life of language" (1935/1994: 74-75), that is, the fostering of linguistic uniformity (standardisation) and the privileging of a single vernacular. According to Graff, the sixteenth century played a crucial role in this process. In this period, governments, schools, and printers ensured that "[s]ome regional vernaculars emerged dominant as national tongues, whereas others died out or survived orally" (1987: 117). Printers were "key figures" (Graff 1987: 117) since "the book trade was in the end fostering the development of those languages – and bringing about the decline of Latin" (Febvre and Martin in Graff 1987: 117). Moreover, thanks to the printing press, printers could fix "spelling, grammar and vocabulary" (Graff 1987: 117). This served to create a language variety that could be referred to as standard and that could achieve the status of national language. The impact of standardisation on language users was gradual and uneven since the chosen linguistic variety was usually that of the middle and upper class and literacy was generally restricted to this very class (Graff 1987: 117, 238). However, in the nineteenth century, a new trend emerged as state institutions started to impose the acquisition of standard languages on the masses via compulsory schooling.

The texts discussed in this thesis were all written when the correlation between language learning, literacy, schooling, standard language, grammar and the literacy myth had already consolidated itself to such an extent that it had become an unquestionable assumption – to paraphrase Cook-Gumperz. My readings of *Hunger of Memory*, *Nuova grammatica finlandese* and *Tera matta* examine how the authors engage this assumption at diegetic level (i.e. the story line, the narrative). However, in the case of *Nuova grammatica* finlandese and *Terra matta*, I will also discuss how the texts engage this assumption at the level of materiality since the texts draw attention to it. *Nuova grammatica finlandese* uses

the trope of the manuscript found in a trunk so that what we read is a (fictional) rewriting of the manuscript as described in the text. While the manuscript was "multimodal" (i.e. consisting of different semiotic modes) and ungrammatical, the rewriting suppresses multimodality and reinstates grammatical correctness and standard language. These dynamics are rehearsed by the publication trajectory of *Terra matta.* When Rabito composed his autobiography, he disregarded the conventions of prose writing and standard Italian. However, the published autobiography partially reinstates them thus radically changing Rabito's original autobiography. The materiality of these texts is important because it weaves a narrative about literacy practices that exists alongside the diegetic level and that shapes how we interpret it.

Since all the texts are written by men, another issue that could be explored is whether the correlation I consider in my analyses is a performance of contemporary masculinity. In other words, do language learning, grammar, etc. come together because they are part of the cultural codes that define manhood? This is an important question since it challenges my argument that representations of language acquisition and literacy can help us understand the dynamics of language learning and literacy in general, suggesting, instead, that the texts are influenced by the gender of the author. However, to explore this question would require a comparison with a corpus of texts authored by women, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. In my analyses, I will, therefore, limit myself to discussing how the authors position gender in relation to literacy at diegetic level.

To refer to the correlation outlined earlier (language acquisition, literacy, schooling, print, standard language, grammar, the literacy myth), I will use the shorthand "essay-text literacy", a term coined by sociolinguist and literacy scholar James Paul Gee. Essay-text literacy refers to both a set of skills and a set of ideas which informs consciousness and how we look at the world. In terms of skills, it includes the ability to compose long pieces of prose, monitoring of grammatical correctness, logicality and reliance on written texts and print for acquiring and disseminating knowledge.[5] As far as world-views go, it includes values that are compatible with the literacy myth, such as the idea that the written word and books are reliable and valuable sources of truth and knowledge and that literacy

[5] The phrases "school-based literacies" (Perry 2010) and "in-school literacy" (Collins 2010) have also been used to refer to what I term "essay-text literacy".

produces enhanced cognition and progress in many areas of human life (Gee 1990/2008: 83).

Gee attributes the term "essay-text literacy" to anthropologists Ron Scollon and Suzanne Scollon and their book *Narrative, Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication* (1981), an ethnographic comparison between the communicative and literacy practices of the Athabaskans (an indigenous North American tribe of interior Alaska and Northern Canada) and those of Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-American society. However, in their book, Scollon and Scollon use "essayist literacy", and not "essay-text literacy".[6] Gee claims that "the terms mean the same" (2019: private correspondence) and that they emphasise different but complementary aspects of this literacy practice. In particular, "the term 'essayist' connects to a form of 'consciousness' (world-view) for the Scollons"; the term 'essay-text' does too but gestures toward print ('texts' in the strict sense), since print is an important historical force in this form of consciousness" (Gee 2019: private correspondence). "Essayist literacy" stresses the extent to which literacy can engender a specific type of consciousness. "Essay-text literacy" stresses the means whereby this consciousness develops, e.g. print and literacy.

By reading the texts I have selected through the lens of essay-text literacy and the literacy narrative approach, it is possible to formulate new interpretations and a new paradigm for interpreting literacy in literary representations. *Hunger of Memory* raised a storm of controversy amongst postcolonial and leftist critics. Rodriguez, drawing on his own upbringing as a Spanish-speaking Chicano in the U.S., suggests that ethnic minorities should leave their cultural and linguistic heritage behind to embrace the mainstream. In Chapter 2 – "Intersemiotic Conflict in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*" – I trace this interpretation to what I term an "ethnic and interlingual" lens, that is, a way of reading that focusses on ethnicity (Chicano and White American, in this case) and the national/natural languages with which they are associated (Spanish and English). I argue that, while this interpretation is correct, *Hunger* also weaves an argument about the influence of semiotic modes and class on language learning and literacy. Alongside the interlingual conflict between Spanish and English, Rodriguez sets up an "intersemiotic" conflict, that is, a conflict

[6] Anthropologist and literacy scholar Brian Street uses "'essay-text' form of literacy" in his seminal book *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984: 1, 41, 130). Street's use of this term predates Gee's "essay-text literacy". It may be that "essay-text literacy" stems from Street as well as Scollon and Scollon.

between semiotic modes that cut across linguistic and ethnic boundaries. Rodriguez pits essay-text literacy, which he associates with the middle class, against literacy practices based mainly on speech and its sounds, which he aligns with the working class.

Diego Marani's *Nuova grammatica finlandese* has generally been read as a poignant story expressing the intrinsic relation between language and identity. Set against the backdrop of the Second World War in Europe, *Grammatica* tells the story of Sampo, an amnesiac and aphasic young man who tries to regain an identity and the ability to speak through Finnish lessons given by a doctor, a Lutheran pastor and a nurse. In Chapter 3 – "The Letter Kills, Singing Gives Life: Literacy and Multimodality in Diego Marani's N*uova grammatica finlandese*" – I argue that the novel is an allegorical rendition of the historical processes that have caused essay-text literacy to gain ascendancy over other literacy practices and semiotic modes. I suggest that Marani draws on Benedict Anderson's concept of "print-capitalism" formulated in *Imagined Communities* (1983/2016) and that he frames the dominance of essay-text literacy as a product of nineteenth-century nationalism and as a loss of semiotic resources for meaning-making and communication. This effect is achieved by associating essay-text literacy and sonic semiotic modes, such as orality, music and group singing, with diametrically opposed sets of ideas. Essay-text literacy is linked to suicide, alienation, madness, despotism and men whilst sonic modes connect with social integration, cognitive, physical well-being and women.

Terra matta (2007) by Vincenzo Rabito has been hailed as a rare example of history "from below", from the point of view of a subaltern. Rabito was born in poverty in Sicily in 1899, started to work as a peasant aged seven and taught himself to read and write when he was fifteen. His autobiography spans the first seventy years of the twentieth century and chronicles the injustice he had to endure because of his socioeconomic ascription as well as the most important events of modern Italian history, which Rabito witnessed first-hand (e.g. the World Wars, the rise of Fascism, the boom of the Sixties). Rabito started composing his autobiography when he was seventy, typing it on a typewriter over three years, from 1968 to 1970. Throughout, he used an invented ungrammatical idiolect that fuses Italian and Sicilian dialect and consistently disregarded the conventions of prose writing (e.g. paragraph and chapter breaks, punctuation, diacritic marks). Before publication, the typescript was heavily redacted since its idiosyncrasies were considered random mistakes due to Rabito's illiteracy. In Chapter 4 – "Illiteracy, Class and Multimodality in Vincenzo Rabito's *Terra*

matta" – I argue that the reception and the editing are the result of generalisations about the relation between schooling, literacy and class. By applying the literacy narrative approach to the published text, I unearth representations of literacy and language learning that challenge the idea that Rabito did not know standard Italian and grammar. Furthermore, by applying multimodality to the original typescript, I argue that its idiosyncrasies are not mistakes but visual and tactile symbols that point to familiarity with essay-text literacy.

The case studies developed in the central chapters of this thesis highlight the advantages of acknowledging that texts about language are never *just* about language, identity and humanity but also about language acquisition and literacy. In such texts, representations of language acquisition and literacy are never far from each other. Studying them can enrich reception, help understand the dynamics of language acquisition and literacy in real-life contexts and stake out a new area of study within literary theory and criticism. In order to realise these advantages, the case studies apply what I term "the literacy narrative approach", a theoretical framework that accounts for the situated dimension of language acquisition and literacy and the political and ideological inequities that underlie them.

Despite these advantages, my case studies have limitations. They mainly use the lens of essay-text literacy and, overall, paint a very bleak picture of language learning and literacy. Literacy is the vehicle of misleading ideas; education systems reinforce social inequalities and dominant literacy practices; teachers are characterised as gatekeepers. What about other literacy practices? What about the idea that literacy and schooling can be sites of transformation, sites that provide "tools to unsettle common sense assumptions, theorise matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity" (Giroux 2001: 3). In the Conclusion, I will explain how we can harness literary representations to reconceptualise literacy and language acquisition as a transformative social practice.

CHAPTER 1: THREE APPROACHES FOR INTERPRETING REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LITERACY

In a 1984 review of Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* – a collection of six autobiographical essays which will be the focus of next chapter – Mark DeLong defines the book as an anomaly. DeLong is confident that the reasons for his claims will be "apparent to most" (1984: 230). Language acquisition is "quite simply, too mundane a phenomenon to be interesting or noteworthy" (1984: 230). Implied in DeLong's statement is the well-known saying "No trouble, no story". Language acquisition does not feature in literature because it is not contentious enough to be appealing to either writers or readers. It is part of everyday life and, barring physical impairment, of everyone's development. (Learning a language is the same as learning to walk.) Who would want to read, or write, about it?

If DeLong's statement were true, I would not be writing this thesis. Representations of language acquisition feature in many literary texts. Furthermore, they are often imbricated with representations of one the most momentous and ideological inventions of human history: literacy. We find literacy and language acquisition addressed in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532/2006), where Gargantua urges his son Pantagruel to learn Chaldaean (a language spoken in Babylon) and Greek by emulating Plato and the New Testament (Rabelais 1532/2006: 48). Jean Paul-Sartre's autobiography *Les mots* (*Words*) (1964) describes how the philosopher acquired literary French at a very early age by reading his grand-parents' books. And, who can forget Robinson Crusoe, who taught Friday English through language lessons based on the Bible (Defoe 1719/2007: 186)? Or Mr Squeers and his combined class in English spelling, grammar and utilitarian philosophy in the early chapters of Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838/2003: 100-102)?

Far from being mundane, representations of language acquisition and literacy can be thought-provoking. They can help us understand why and how we acquire language and literacy, how these relate to identity, ideology and other semiotic modes, and how they have changed through history. Literacy is crucial in unravelling these questions because it is an invention that has deeply influenced human communication and social structures. In many contemporary literate societies, for instance, it is difficult to bypass literacy. Literacy shapes the lives and linguistic development of people since it tends to be enforced from a

very young age through compulsory education. As a result of this, people who cannot read or write tend not to be considered competent language users although they may able to speak fluently. Moreover, besides being an integral part of our lives, issues of literacy are an inescapable feature of literary texts. Literary texts are made of words and writing and originate from the author's socialisation in literacy practices. A literary text's materiality is always already an allusion to literacy that, if examined, can outline narratives about literacy and language acquisition.

The above suggests that DeLong's idea that language acquisition is not a noteworthy theme in literature is short-sighted. At the same time, however, DeLong accurately reflects the status of this theme within literary criticism and literary theory. At the time of DeLong's writing, there was no research that suggested that there is a corpus of texts about language acquisition, nor that representations thereof could be approached hermeneutically and produce compelling interpretations. Scholars began to turn their attention to them at the beginning of the 1990s, formulating theoretical frameworks specifically geared to this type of representation. Although we now have more scholarship on this subject-matter than in 1984, this has not yet impacted literary studies and criticism at large, nor can it be said to constitute a clearly defined field. The aim of this chapter is to synthesise this scholarship and to start tracing the contours of an area of literary criticism and literary theory that addresses not only representations of language acquisition but also that integral aspect of language acquisition called literacy.

Basing myself on shared theoretical preoccupations and disciplinary allegiances, I have subdivided scholarship into three approaches – the language learner approach, the translation approach and the literacy narrative approach. I argue that these approaches have three common denominators. First, they are all concerned with genre (Do texts about language acquisition and literacy constitute a genre in their own right?) and with devising a terminology for labelling texts and/or representations of language learning. Second, they all posit representations of language acquisition as powerful epistemological tools that can shed light on a range of language-related phenomena. Further, I argue that both the translation approach and the literacy narrative approach highlight the sociohistorical and ideological dimension of language learning. This aspect is not totally absent from the language learner approach, but it is not addressed head-on, which limits the epistemological potential of this approach. Although there are commonalities between the approaches, the

literacy narrative approach is presented as the most useful approach because it systematically acknowledges that literacy is a factor that significantly informs language learning both in texts and in real life. In the literacy narrative approach, literacy and language acquisition belong to the same paradigm and this is what, in my view, makes it superior to the others.

Although I clearly side with the literacy narrative approach, I also discuss the other approaches since my aim is to stake out a field that has not been sufficiently acknowledged or mapped out. Furthermore, the literacy narrative approach does not discount the founding concerns of the other approaches (e.g. the figure of the language learner). This means that some of the terminology and concepts developed by the language learner approach and the translation approach can also be relevant for the literacy narrative approach. In my practical applications, I will, when appropriate, highlight instances in which this is the case.

In section 1, I illustrate the language learner approach. I argue that this approach has three main characteristics. Firstly, it concentrates on how writers represent the subjective dimension of language acquisition. This approach has the critic focus primarily on the figure of the language learner, the bodily consequences of language acquisition and the relation between language acquisition and affect.[1] The overall goal is to extrapolate theories about extra-textual, language-related, phenomena (e.g. the nexus between language and identity). Secondly, although it acknowledges that representations of language acquisition occur in different genres, this approach has privileged the study of autobiographical writing. Thirdly, the language learner approach has developed through contributions from two traditionally separate fields: literary studies and a branch of the social sciences called Second Language Acquisition (SLA). I argue that these three features are traceable to a 1994 essay entitled "On Language Memoir" by Alice Kaplan. I therefore provide an analysis of Kaplan's essay which includes an illustration of the theoretical framework that she puts forward and an evaluation of her practical applications since they exemplify some of the limitations of this approach.

In section 2, I describe the translation approach; I argue that this approach focusses on texts about second language acquisition to enlarge "the ordinary-language sense of

[1] Affect means the bodily externalisation of inner emotions and feelings (Doss 2009: 9; Cvetkovich 2014: 13). Affect brings together the emotive, physical and embodied dimensions of human life.

translation" (Tymoczko 2007: 56). The word "translation" tends to evoke texts in different languages and professional translators/interpreters. The translation approach seeks to enlarge this conceptualisation by looking at migrants and their subjective experiences with language/s. I trace this approach to translation studies scholarship and, in particular, to a line of thought that goes from *Translation and Subjectivity* (1997/1999) by Naoki Sakai, "Translation and Migration" (2012) by Loredana Polezzi through to *Transnationalising Modern Languages* (TML), a large 2014 research project of which Polezzi was part.

In section 3, I discuss the literacy narrative approach. I argue that this approach stems from, and reformulates, Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen's essay "Reading Literacy Narratives" (1992) and that it has two defining characteristics: it uses the label "literacy narrative" to refer to representations of language acquisition and literacy and insights from a field called "New Literacy Studies". I note that Eldred and Mortensen provide three specific tools for discussing literacy narratives and that these have been discounted altogether by the mentors of this approach. This raises the question of the tools' usefulness. By analysing how Eldred and Mortensen apply them, I argue that their tools afford valuable insights and that they should be considered an integral component of the approach. Finally, I discuss some of the limitations of the approach. I note how Eldred and Mortensen and those who have taken up their essay tend to switch seamlessly from the word "language" to "literacy", and to use "literacy" as a shorthand for semiotic modes other than language-as-writing (e.g. speech, sound, image). I argue that this causes confusion and undercuts the potential of the approach. I therefore propose that the literacy narrative approach should draw from the field of multimodality since it provides a vocabulary that defines the boundaries of semiotic systems more rigorously. Doing this widens the range of elements taken into account in analysis, which can lead to better-informed interpretations.

1.1 *The language learner approach*

The language learner approach can be defined as a form of literary criticism that studies representations of language acquisition by focussing on the figure of the language learner. The goal is to extrapolate theories about a wide range of language-related phenomena. This approach has developed through research by scholars affiliated to literary studies (Alice

Kaplan, Mary Besemeres and Helen O'Sullivan) and to a discipline called Second Language Acquisition (Aneta Pavlenko and Clare Kramsch). Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a social science and a branch of applied linguistics that studies how people learn second languages in order to solve language problems that arise in real-life contexts.

In the scholarship that forms the language learner approach, the language learner is not framed as a literacy learner (although s/he may be able to read and write) but, more generally, as someone who learns a particular national/natural language, dialect, or sociolect. This does not mean that issues pertaining to literacy acquisition never arise, but they are not considered sufficiently distinct from language learning to be addressed as a separate and complementary issue. The privileging of language learning is reflected in the terminology that these scholars have employed.

The most popular terms for texts representing language acquisition are "language memoir" (Kaplan 1994; Pavlenko 2001a; Besemeres 2002: 64; Kramsch 2004: 2; Kramsch 2009: 26-27) and "cross-cultural autobiography" (Pavlenko 2001b: 318; Besemeres 2002). However, these often feature alongside others, i.e. "language learning memoirs" (Pavlenko 2001b: 321), "language learning autobiographies" (Pavlenko 2002: 213), "immigrant autobiographies" (Pavlenko 2001a: 215), "ethnic autobiography" (Besemeres 2002: 161), "narratives of language migration" (Besemeres 2002: 275) and "language learner narrative" (O'Sullivan 2014: 57). Unlike Eldred and Mortensen's "literacy narrative", none of these terms alludes to literacy; instead, what is foregrounded is either language or categories in which language plays an important role, such as culture, im/migration, and ethnicity.

Besides neglecting literacy, some of the terminology of the language learner approach points to a bias towards autobiographical writing. Representations of language acquisition tend to be conceptualised as memoirs or autobiographies specifically about language learning. For instance, "language memoir" was coined by Alice Kaplan who defined it as "an entire genre of twentieth-century autobiographical writing which is in essence about language learning" (Kaplan 1994: 59); "cross-cultural autobiography" is a term borrowed from Rebecca and Joseph Hogan and refers to autobiographies about "the development of the self on and across the borders of languages and cultures" (Hogan and Hogan 1997: 150). Implied in these definitions is the assumption that, when language acquisition appears, it is central (rather than incidental or isolated) and that there exists a

subgenre of autobiography which has the theme of language learning as its defining characteristic.

The terms that do not point to autobiographical writing are "narrative of language migration" and "language learner narrative". However, narrative of language migration is a red herring. It is used by Mary Besemeres at the end of *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (2002) as a synonym of cross-cultural autobiography. Furthermore, in this book, Besemeres subsumes poems and novels under cross-cultural autobiography on the grounds that their authors had themselves experienced linguistic and cultural border-crossings and that this informed their work (2002: 11-12; 34-35). For Besemeres, representations of language acquisition are *always* autobiographical even when the texts being analysed are not autobiographies in the strict sense.

The only term that extends the purview of representations of language learning to genres other than memoirs and autobiographies is "language learner narrative". "Language learner narrative" was coined by O'Sullivan in *Language Learner Narrative: An Exploration of Mündigkeit in Intercultural Literature* (2014) and stems from an overt critique of works that align representation of language acquisition with autobiographical writing. O'Sullivan discusses the labels "language memoir" (2014: 39) and "cross-cultural autobiography" (2014: 29) and argues that it is misleading to think of texts about language acquisition as a genre. Firstly, since these labels are relatively recent, a text that we now classify as, say, a "language memoir" was originally conceived as something else, an autobiography, for instance; therefore, there may be other important issues and themes to consider alongside language learning (2014: 38-40). Secondly, using the lens of genre implies that language acquisition can only feature as a central theme (2014: 50-51); this may cause the critic to neglect texts in which language acquisition is articulated via isolated scenes (2014: 29).

O'Sullivan's "language learner narrative" offers more flexibility than its counterparts. It is a "descriptor" that "does not encompass the entirety of a text" and "may be restricted to particular textual passages and quotations" (2014: 57). Furthermore, as O'Sullivan herself notes, it "crosses common boundaries so as to include a diverse range of textual styles and traditional genres, including the fictional, the non-fictional, the autobiographical, the semi-autobiographical, the poetic and the prosaic" (2014: 58). Notwithstanding the flexibility afforded by this term, O'Sullivan only discusses autobiographical representations of learning a second language. As she is aware of this

limitation, O'Sullivan urges other scholars to extend their research to narratives from other genres (2014: 253).

Critics' tendency to focus on autobiographical writing is not random but the consequence of a specific historical conjuncture. As Pavlenko has noted in her essay "Language Learning Memoirs as a Gendered Genre", "the twentieth century has witnessed an explosion of [autobiographical] narratives which linked two or more cultures, expressing the 'narrated self as a conjuncture *between* languages and cultures' (Hokenson 1995: 92)" (Pavlenko 2001b: 215, Pavlenko's italics). Pavlenko mentions sixteen "language memoirs" written in English and published between 1975 and 1999 which include Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* and Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (2001b: 222). The list is, by no means, definitive and can include twentieth-century language memoirs in other languages, such as Elias Canetti's *Die Gerettete Zunge* (*The Tongue Set Free*) (1977) (in German), Gavino Ledda's *Padre padrone: l'educazione di un pastore* (*My Father, My Master: The Education of a Shepherd*) (1975) (in Italian), Annie Ernaux's *La Place* (*The Place*) (1983) (in French) and Jacques Derrida's *Le Monolingualisme de l'Autre: ou la Prothèse d'Origine* (*Monolingualism of the Other: The Prosthesis of Origin*) (1996) (also in French).[2]

Since research about representations of language learning began to develop in the early 1990s, that is, during the "explosion" of language memoirs, it is possible that this conjuncture made scholars more inclined to think of representations of language acquisition exclusively as autobiography. Furthermore, in 1994, the novelist and French studies scholar Alice Kaplan published an influential essay which posits texts about language acquisition as a subgenre of autobiography. What follows is an analysis of this essay. I will explain the reasons why Kaplan welds language acquisition to autobiography, the theoretical framework that she proposes and how other scholars have reformulated it, forming what I have called "the language learner approach".

"On Language Memoir" is a short, twelve-page piece which features in a collection of essays titled *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (1994). As the title suggests, this collection is about "displacement": a social phenomenon involving the uprooting from one's native culture due to migration, colonialism or conflict. The editor, Angelika Bammer, explains that the aim of the volume is to illustrate how this phenomenon impacts individual

[2] For a more exhaustive list, see O'Sullivan (2014: 259-263).

definitions of cultural identity "in particular, concrete terms" (Bammer 1994: xii). Being uprooted from one's culture, Bammer argues, causes people to become aware and/or renegotiate the reference points that constitute their cultural identity (Bammer 1994: xiv-xv). The volume thus charts what these reference points may be by means of a mixture of traditional theoretical essays (e.g. Bhabha 1994: 269-272), autobiographical essays (e.g. Hirsch 1994: 71-89) and semi-autobiographical narratives (e.g. Hak Kyung Cha 1994: 273). "On Language Memoir" is both theoretical and autobiographical and, within the economy of the volume, it charts the role of language in processes of identity formation. It is, in other words, an attempt to define the reasons why language often comes to be cited as an identity marker, as a factor influencing one's sense of self.

The question that drives Kaplan may seem trite. The relation between language and identity has been central in many areas of thought for some time (Besemeres 2002: 19-20; Joseph 2004: 42). As mentioned in the Introduction, in the mid-eighteenth century, Condillac argued that it is only through language and words that humans achieve a sense of identity (in Itard 1801/2012: 14; in Newton 2002: 119). During the German Romantic period, Johannes Gottfried Herder popularised the idea that language has a spirit (*Sprachgeist*) that reflects the soul of a people (*Volksseele*) (in Gambarota 2006: 285). Implied in the mystical terms of Herder's argument is the idea that language and identity (the soul) are inextricably linked (one implies the other). In the second half of the twentieth century, postmodern thinkers expressed similar ideas by using less mystical terms. Statements like Lacan's "the unconscious, which tells the truth about truth, is structured like a language" (1996/2006: 737), Derrida's "there is nothing outside the text" (1967/1997: 163) and Kristeva's concept of the "subject-in-process" (1986/1996: 132) suggest that one's sense of self cannot be divorced from language and discourse because the self expresses itself, learns about itself, and thinks itself, in language.

Kaplan's question draws from theories about the language-identity nexus but it does not reiterate them; rather, it asks for information that they cannot provide. Herder, Lacan, Derrida and others can only tell us that language and identity are inextricably linked. Kaplan goes a step further as she seeks to understand "in particular, concrete terms" how and why language embeds itself into identity so deeply that one can go as far as equating it with, say, his/her soul (Herder) and unconscious (Lacan).

Kaplan begins her essay with an autobiographical anecdote. She recounts that, for several years, she had been working on a memoir about learning French (*French Lessons* [1993]) and that this challenged her to think about the relation between language and identity. Kaplan explains that she had turned to "scholarly disquisitions" about second language learning from the social sciences (Kaplan cites linguistics, sociology and education) looking for answers but did not find any, only "methods and statistics and the occasional anecdote" (Kaplan 1994: 59). Answers came from fiction and autobiographical writing: "When I turned to fiction, I found, to my delight, that there is an entire genre of twentieth-century autobiographical writing which is in essence about language learning" (Kaplan 1994: 59).[3] Kaplan calls this genre "language memoir". Texts classifiable as language memoirs, Kaplan observes, are not unknown texts but texts that have either been previously categorised as autobiography, *Bildungsroman* (1994: 69), or discussed to expound subject-matters other than language acquisition, e.g. "the history of a specific ethnic or national literature", "upward social mobility", "exile" (1994: 69). Language memoirs can be about the acquisition of a foreign language but also about the acquisition of a dialect or sociolect based on one's first language (1994: 69).

Besides the definition of a new genre, what is striking about this passage is the alignment of "fiction" with "autobiographical writing". Autobiographical writing is generally considered so different from fiction that it is referred to as *non*-fiction. Elements that distinguish autobiographical writing from fiction include first-person narration, the identity between the author, the protagonist and the narrator (Couser 1995: 36) and a higher "referential status" (Marcus 1994: 203). Autobiographical writing can lay grander claims to extra-textual reality than fiction because it is grounded on "a verifiable relation between the text and an extratextual referent, its author's life" (Couser 1995: 34).

[3] The translation scholar George Steiner expressed similar ideas twenty years before Kaplan. In his *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* published in 1975, he lamented a lack of research on the relation between language, multilingualism and identity within linguistics. Steiner argued that to explore this issue, one "must argue from within" (1975/1998: 120) (i.e. autobiographically) and urged linguists to turn to literature and to submit "memoirs of [multilingual] poets, novelists and refugees" to serious analysis (1975/1998: 125-129). Nevertheless, Kaplan is generally regarded as the initiator of research on this topic. This may be traceable to the different weight that the authors confer on this topic. Steiner addresses it in passing in a book that is concerned with definitions of translation and translation processes. Kaplan, on the other hand, addresses it head-on.

Kaplan's unproblematic alignment of fiction and autobiographical writing is likely to be an expression of Paul de Man's postmodern theories about autobiography as a genre.[4] In "Autobiography as De-Facement" (1979), Paul de Man challenged the referentiality of autobiography and argued that it is "akin to a fiction" (1979: 920-921) because "what the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture" (de Man 1979: 920-921). For de Man, what we read in an autobiography is different from the author's life because autobiography is mediated by the semiotic mode used (literary language) and because it is a genre with its own conventions and tropes which the writer adheres to when writing.

Although Kaplan draws on de Man's theories, she does not relinquish the idea of referentiality and of truth-value normally associated with autobiographical writing. Her position is much more moderate and closer to that of another theorist of autobiography: Philippe Lejeune. In *Le pacte autobiographique* (*The Autobiographical Pact*) (1975/1996), Lejeune argues that texts classified as autobiography involve a quasi-legal pact between reader and author which requires the author to express some truth based on lived experience and the reader to accept what the author reports as true (1975/1996: 36-37).

In Kaplan's essay, the language memoir is aligned with fiction but fulfils the criteria of Lejeune's autobiographical pact. It is a reliable epistemological tool, a source of knowledge as to why language often comes to be cited as an identity marker. The language memoir, Kaplan argues, has a "particular magic" (1994:60) that affords insights into the language-identity nexus. Magic is the language memoir's ability to record "what is really going on *inside the head* of a person who suddenly finds herself *passionately engaged* in new sounds and a new voice" (1994: 59, my italics). Magic, in other words, refers to representations of the affective consequences of language acquisition from the learner's viewpoint. The texts that Kaplan cites as examples of this genre (e.g. Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* [1951/1979], Canetti's *Die Gerettete Zunge* [*The Tongue Set Free*] [1977], Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* [1989/1991], Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au Harem d'Archi Ahmed* [*Tea at Archi Ahmed's Harem*] [1983], Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* [1982/2004]) all foreground scenes in which the author/protagonist describes the subjective consequences of language learning. For Kaplan, the relation between language and identity can be

[4] Kaplan was a student of de Man's at Yale in the 1970s. In *French Lessons*, she describes de Man as a teacher and as a leading figure of Deconstruction (Kaplan 1993: 147-174).

explained by reading and studying these scenes. The language memoir's magic is self-sufficient and does not need other theoretical constructs. Kaplan deems it to be superior to the tool of "subject positioning" (i.e. class, race, gender, sexuality) normally used in "contemporary criticism" (1994: 60) and, as noted earlier, to "disquisitions" from language-related social sciences (linguistics, sociology, education) (1994: 59).

The idea that the language memoir's magic is a self-sufficient tool can, however, be challenged. The status of the language memoir as autobiographical writing is a factor that significantly bolsters its magic. If language memoirs are "magical" epistemological tools, it because they are a subgenre of autobiography: they are written in the first person and can be conceptualised as having a higher truth-value than other genres. The language memoir's particular magic resides in the characteristics of autobiographical writing. In her essay, Kaplan does not make this explicit. Furthermore, the word "magic" couches the essay in esoteric terms that foreclose associations with existing schools of thought and genre theories.

Kaplan's reticence to disclose her theoretical allegiance extends to the essay's underlying thesis. Kaplan argues that we can understand why language and identity are related by focussing on "magic", that is, on the language learner's own account of how language acquisition has influenced his/her own body and emotions. On the one hand, her thesis is convincing since Kaplan provides a tangible source of information for understanding the language-identity nexus, i.e. the language memoir. (Do you want to know why language and identity are related? Then, read a language memoir.) On the other, it could be argued that by reading a language memoir, all we can infer is that language acquisition triggers affective reactions. In other words, I may not be able to explain why these reactions ensure that language becomes part of one's identity. Reading a language memoir does not necessarily imply an understanding of its meaning, notwithstanding Kaplan's claim that language memoirs have a "particular magic" that conveys it.

Kaplan's claim is less the result of magic than the result of an anti-Cartesian view of identity formation. An anti-Cartesian view of identity formation rejects René Descartes's famous statement "I think, therefore, I am" (Descartes 1637/1998:18) and the idea that human identity is located solely in the mind and rational reasoning. Instead, it locates human identity in the body, emotions and affect so that you are what you feel, rather than what you think. In *Language and Identity*, John Joseph lends support to such a view. He

argues that emotions' "deepest connection is with the concept of *individual self* – hence of identity. There is a widespread tendency to locate who one is – one's subjective self – in one's individual feelings" (2004: 17, Joseph's italics). Emotions, affect and feelings are an integral part of who we are and, consequently, shape identity formation.

If we accept this, we can understand why language is often equated with identity and why Kaplan posits language memoirs as an epistemological tool about the language-identity nexus. Language is dependent on language acquisition for its actualisation and internalisation. Language memoirs contain scenes where language acquisition impacts emotions and the body, two key aspects of human identity. These texts, therefore, can be harnessed to lend support to the idea that the affect produced by language learning ties identity to language and that literary representation affords reliable insights into this phenomenon.

Kaplan applies her anti-Cartesian framework to three language memoirs: Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1982/2004), Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* (1951/1979) and her own *French Lessons* (1993). *Hunger of Memory*, the focus of Chapter 2, is set in the U.S. between 1944 and the late 1970s. Rodriguez is the son of Spanish-speaking working-class Chicanos and, until the age of six, spoke only Spanish. In his memoir, he recounts how he learned English through schooling. *A Walker in the City* is set in the U.S. in the 1930s (the years of the Great Depression). Kazin is of Jewish origin and was brought up in a deprived area of Brooklyn speaking a nonstandard and Yiddish-inflected English. In his memoir, he narrates how he learned Standard English in the classroom and through speech therapy. In *French Lessons*, Kaplan (the daughter of a wealthy Jewish lawyer living in the U.S.) tells the story of how she learned French at a Swiss boarding school and, subsequently, perfected it in France and at Yale university.

Kaplan's practical applications of her theoretical framework are reminiscent of F.R. Leavis's New Criticism (Barry 1995: 16). They consist of citations from the memoirs themselves followed by either a summary of a related passage and/or a short paraphrase stressing the centrality of affect – e.g. "There is no language change without emotional consequences. Principally: loss" (1994: 63), "Language is the place where our bodies and mind collide" (1994: 64). Kaplan does not unpack the text and treats it largely as self-explanatory. This becomes evident in Kaplan's interpretation of *French Lessons*. Kaplan cites only one passage from her memoir but this spans five pages (almost half of the entire essay)

and is followed by a brief epigrammatic statement: “The change in language is the emblem of a *leap* into a new persona” (Kaplan 1994: 69, Kaplan’s italics).

Treating the text as self-explanatory is consistent with the idea that the language memoir is a “magical” epistemological tool and with Kaplan’s (alleged) dissociation from existing disciplines and schools of thought. Nevertheless, Kaplan’s interpretations are reductive because they treat all language memoirs and language learners as if they were identical when they are, in fact, very different. Although Kaplan suggests that language learning always involves a mixture of pain and pleasure (1994: 63) and that “there is more to language learning than the memorisation of verbs and the mastery of an accent” (1994: 69), she does not differentiate between the degrees of pain and pleasure across her chosen memoirs. For Rodriguez and Kazin, language acquisition is more painful than for Kaplan. For Kaplan, learning French is an intellectual challenge and a source of self-fulfilment – one of her main concerns is, in fact, to get rid of her American accent to approximate standard French pronunciation (in Kaplan 1994: 67). For Rodriguez and Kazin, it is a traumatic experience. Rodriguez, who had been brought up speaking only Spanish, was forced by his parents and teachers to speak exclusively English both at home and at school, which resulted in the loss of family closeness and harmony (in Kaplan 1994: 61). Like Rodriguez, Kazin, who had been brought up speaking a mixture of Yiddish and English, learned English at school. When in the classroom, Kazin would stammer which resulted in weekly sessions with a speech therapist who filled him with “wild passive despair” (1994: 62). The sessions were particularly traumatic for Kazin because the therapist corrected not only his stammer but also his Yiddish-inflected pronunciation to bring it into line with standard American-English pronunciation.

The differences between the memoirs can be explained by using the tool that Kaplan discounts from the outset, namely, “subject positioning” (e.g. class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality). Both Rodriguez and Kazin were disadvantaged learners because of their ethnicity, social class, and, in the case of Kazin, physical disability too. They had been brought up speaking a language that was neither their country’s official language, nor that of their education system. As a result, they had to deal with issues such as alienation, accepting/rejecting assimilation, denigration of their linguistic heritage and coercion at the hand of social institutions (the family, the education system, the health system). Kaplan was a language learner who, from birth, had easy access to a considerable amount of cultural

and symbolic capital. Although Kaplan's parents (like Kazin's) were of Jewish origin and, therefore, belonged to an ethnic and cultural minority, Kaplan was brought up in the U.S. speaking its official language, English. Her linguistic heritage matched the linguistic practices of the U.S. nation. This eased her socialisation and her integration in the classroom and facilitated her acquisition of French. Moreover, her family belonged to the upper/middle class and could afford the fees commanded by elite education establishments as well as recurrent stays in France. Unlike Kazin and Rodriguez, Kaplan pursued French acquisition out of personal choice and because she had the material means to do so.

Subject positioning produces more nuanced interpretations than magic alone since it allows for historical contextualisation. Contextualisation, in turn, can unearth the dynamics of ideology within the text. This corroborates the idea central to this thesis and to the literacy narrative approach, namely, that representations of language acquisition should be interpreted through the lens of ideology and history. Kaplan neglects this aspect of interpretation and thus overlooks a key element of the texts, that is, the power struggles in which Kazin and Rodriguez were involved. Kaplan makes the language memoirs she analyses in the image of her own *French Lessons* and provides interpretations that are not only reductive but also biased towards her own learning experiences, which only reflect those of dominant social groups.

This issue of bias has been pinpointed by Morris Young in *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship* (2004), a book that discusses Asian American autobiographies about learning English as a second language from a postcolonial perspective. As the title itself suggests, *Minor Re/Visions* is informed by Eldred and Mortensen's "Reading Literacy Narratives", but Young briefly discusses "On Language Memoir" as well.[5] Young notes that both essays can be used to interpret texts about language acquisition but rejects Kaplan's because it is at odds with his own postcolonial perspective. Young defines Kaplan as "an academic at an elite university writing about acquiring French as opposed to learning English or developing literacy from a minor position

[5] Young's book is the only piece of scholarship that seems to be aware of both "On Language Memoir" and "Reading Literacy Narratives". Aside from Young, scholars who have addressed representations of language acquisition in literature have built on either one essay or the other. In an endnote, Young himself remarks how Kaplan herself never mentions Eldred and Mortensen's essay although this was published two years before hers. Young traces this omission to "disciplinary (perhaps) generic boundaries that keep related works from interacting with each other" (Young 2004: 202).

of race or social class" (Young 2004: 33). Young underscores the idea that "On Language Memoir" reflects only the experiences and viewpoint of dominant social groups and discourages critics from using it as a framework for interpretation.

Should we, therefore, cast "On Language Memoir" aside as Young does? As we have seen, the concept of "magic" does not ensure insightful interpretation. Furthermore, Kaplan treats language memoirs as self-explanatory, which runs the risk of erasing differences and of reproducing ideological constructions of language learning. These weaknesses notwithstanding, it is undeniable that many language memoirs are concerned with language learners and with the affective reactions that language acquisition triggers. According to Kaplan, at the time of her writing, language memoirs were the only source of information about it. Disciplines that could have addressed it, such as literary criticism and language-related social sciences, did not and thus neglected an important area of research.

Kaplan's essay highlights important issues. If we adopt the anti-Cartesian view of identity formation that undergirds it (notwithstanding Kaplan's reticence to disclose this), language memoirs can indeed become epistemological tools about the language-identity nexus. Moreover, since its publication, "On Language Memoir" has been endorsed by many scholars, forming what I have called the "language learner approach". Contributors come from literary studies and SLA, a branch of applied linguistics that examines how people acquire a second language. The terminology they use to refer to texts about language acquisition may not always include "language memoir", and may not always denote a genre, but it is part of an interpretive framework that seeks to shed light on extra-textual, language-related phenomena by focussing on literary representations of language learners.

Writing from a literary studies perspective, Mary Besemeres and Helen O'Sullivan have formulated frameworks which require the critic to take a specific language-related phenomenon and to locate it in the texts under examination. The phenomenon is theorised independently of the texts; the texts are then used as evidence of its occurrence and as a source of information about its dynamics. In *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (2002), Mary Besemeres uses Hogan and Hogan's generic label "cross-cultural autobiography" (Hogan and Hogan 1997: 150) as well as "ethnic autobiography" (Besemeres 2002: 161), "language memoir" (Besemeres 2002: 64) and "narratives of language migration" (Besemeres 2002: 275). She argues that these genres can shed light on the identity formation processes of "language migrants", that is, people

who, due to displacement, had to learn a second language and use it on a daily basis (Besemeres 2002: 9).

Besemeres maintains that language migrants form their identity through "self-translation". Self-translation refers to the loss of the identity and world-views which the migrant developed when learning his/her first language and to the formation of a new identity rooted in the second language. Here, the word "translation" is used metaphorically because it does not refer to texts in different languages. This metaphorical use is traceable to the title of Hoffman's language memoir *Lost in Translation.* As Besemeres remarks, it is the author, herself a migrant, "who is imagined as 'lost in translation', by analogy with the meaning of a [translated] text. […]" (2002: 9). Further, in her book, Hoffman compares learning English as second language to a "translation" of the self (1989/1991: 189, 211). For Hoffman and Besemeres, "translation" is a suitable metaphor because they see the self as consisting of language (just like a text) and because, in their view, when a migrant learns another language, his/her self changes in response to the newly acquired language (a process which has analogies with the translation of a text).

As a concept, self-translation draws on postmodern theories about the centrality of language for self-formation and on the theories of linguistic relativity formulated by the German Romantic thinker Wilhelm von Humboldt and the linguist Edward Sapir. The former has argued that that each national/natural language engenders a particular self and that the self changes in response to the acquisition of a new language (Besemeres 2002: 18); the latter has extended the correlation between language and identity to culture so that language engenders not only the self but also the world-views and attitudes of a particular culture (Besemeres 2002: 37).

Besemeres seeks to demonstrate the occurrence of self-translation through the study of cross-cultural autobiographies written by language migrants who have become professional writers. She focusses on instances where the author's identity is destabilised and describes the factors that trigger it (e.g. migration, schooling, the family, writing one's work in different languages). Her final goal is to evaluate the "depth" of the author, that is, the author's ability to embrace and reconcile the self developed via the first language with the self developed via the second language. Within this framework a writer like Rodriguez has less depth than, say, Hoffman because he gave in to "pressures to conform linguistically and culturally" to the U.S. mainstream (Besemeres 2002: 275).

In her *Language Learner Narrative: An Exploration of Mündigkeit in Intercultural Literature* (2014), O'Sullivan proceeds in a manner similar to Besemeres's. She chooses a term for referring to representations of language acquisition, she defines a phenomenon and then maps it out onto texts in order to highlight its dynamics. As explained earlier, O'Sullivan, unlike Kaplan and Besemeres, does not posit the existence of a genre specifically concerned with language acquisition. Instead, she argues that language acquisition always exists alongside other themes and, therefore, should be conceptualised as "portions" of texts that "can be isolated as [and termed] language learner narratives" (2014: 51).

According to O'Sullivan, language learner narratives point to the existence of a "transcendental signified" (i.e. a universal, an entity which applies to anyone) called *Mündigkeit.* O'Sullivan borrows *Mündigkeit* from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and his essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784/1996). *Mündigkeit* is "the ability to use one's reason without being led by another" as well as the definition of Enlightenment itself (in O'Sullivan 2014: 112). O'Sullivan argues that *Mündigkeit* is facilitated by linguistic fluency and by what Pierre Bourdieu calls "linguistic capital", that is, the mastery of languages and sociolects which command respect and authority within a given society (2014: 126-128). *Mündigkeit*, in other words, is a function of language and can be exercised when we are proficient in the linguistic modes of communications which have a degree of capital (prestige) in the context in which we operate and live (2014: 247-248).

To demonstrate her thesis, O'Sullivan harnesses autobiographical language learner narratives about second language acquisition hailing from radically different sociocultural backgrounds. O'Sullivan chooses difference as a rationale because this lends support to the idea that *Mündigkeit* is a transcendental signifier that cuts across individual circumstances (2014: 248-249). Furthermore, by using statistical linguistic analysis, she notes how all the narratives contain similar metaphors. For example, the language learner is often infantilised and compared to a child, while the language being learned tends to be compared to a trap (2014: 199-217). For O'Sullivan, these metaphors are indexical of a loss of *Mündigkeit* and of the existence of *Mündigkeit* itself.

Besemeres and O'Sullivan provide frameworks which instruct the critic to locate a particular phenomenon in the text. The text provides evidence of the phenomenon, but it also helps to define it. Besemeres describes what self-translation is and the factors that

trigger it; O'Sullivan suggests that we can glimpse *Mündigkeit* whenever we find certain metaphors. These frameworks are consistent with the idea that representations of language acquisition have an epistemological role. However, they are very narrow. Besemeres's and O'Sullivan's analyses suggest that there is more at stake in representations of language learning than the phenomena on which they focus. When we read *Translating One's Self* and *Language Learner Narratives*, we become aware of how language acquisition intersects with literacy, ideology and history. Besemeres mentions, for instance, the pressure of institutions and literacy on learners but, as she is interested in evaluating the author's "depth", she neglects them. The metaphors that, for O'Sullivan, are indexical of *Mündigkeit* call for other, less transcendental, interpretations. For instance, could the metaphor of "the non-fluent speaker is a child" be the expression of prejudice against ungrammatical speech deriving from the dominance of essay-text literacy? The same criticism that I have levelled at Kaplan can be levelled at Besemeres and O'Sullivan. Without putting ideology and historical contextualisation at the centre, we are likely to neglect important textual elements and produce reductive interpretations.

Besides influencing literary studies, "On Language Memoir" has had an impact on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). SLA became a clearly defined field in the mid-1980s (Block 2003). Before then, research about second language acquisition was carried out under the umbrella of social sciences such as those that Kaplan mentions in "On Language Memoir" (linguistics, education, sociology). According to Kaplan, the social sciences that now form SLA were neglecting an important aspect of language acquisition, that is, the language-identity nexus. Kaplan argues that language memoirs could provide the information that the social sciences did not supply.

Kaplan's critique is an accurate and timely account of second language acquisition research in the mid-1990s. At the time of her writing, the language-identity nexus was not addressed explicitly by studies of language acquisition. Researchers were not using methodologies that attempted to access the learner's subjective and affective experiences (Block 2014: 61, 64, 67,74). This was, as David Block has put it, a topic that was "lurking in the wings" (Block 2014: 86). At the same time, Kaplan's ideas are difficult to square with the social sciences. Literary texts, whether autobiographical or not, are generally not used by social scientists because they are viewed as unreliable data, as fabrications swayed by authorial intention, the vagaries of memory, aesthetics and generic conventions. Data is

usually gathered via first-hand observations of empirically verifiable real-life events. Moreover, language-centred social sciences (and the social sciences in general) have Cartesian roots. Writing in 2004, sociolinguist John Joseph noted that "linguists and philosophers of language write within a tradition focused on rational thought" and that "until recently, they have shunned emotions as constituting an anti-rational domain that could not be subjected to rational enquiry" (2004: 16-17).

Most social scientists would reject Kaplan's ideas outright, however accurate her assessment of their field may be. Nevertheless, "On Language Memoir" has been taken up by applied linguists and SLA researchers Aneta Pavlenko and Claire Kramsch. Both Pavlenko and Kramsch have argued that language memoirs are epistemological tools that can further SLA research. For Kramsch, SLA needs the study of language memoirs to "help recover the subjective, symbolic dimension of language study" (2004: 11); for Pavlenko, SLA is too centred on "the voices of the – often monolingual – researchers" and leaves no room "for the voices of bilinguals themselves" (1998: 4-5). Kramsch and Pavlenko see in the first-person narratives of the language memoir a tool that could redress these imbalances and bring new insights into the dynamics of second language learning.

Kramsch's and Pavlenko's research can be subdivided into two phases: a pre-2000 phase and a post-2000 phase. The pre-2000 phase involves using language memoirs as data gathered through first-hand observation of real-life situation with a view to extrapolating theories about how ordinary people learn a second language. This phase includes Pavlenko's "Second Language Learning by Adults: Testimonies of Bilingual Writers" (1998) and "Second Language Learning as Participation and the (Re)construction of the Self" (2000), co-written with James Lantolf. In "Second Language Learning by Adults", Pavlenko uses language memoirs to put forward a language learning model consisting of discrete stages which she calls "self-translation" (1998: 17). Pavlenko's concept of self-translation is similar to Besemeres's in that it refers to the changes in one's identity brought about by second language acquisition: "On the basis of this novel source of data [language memoirs] an argument is presented for new metaphors of SLL,[6] new approaches to SLL and for the existence […] of two stages of SLL: a stage of losses and a stage of gains, with specific substages within" (1998: 3).

[6] SLL stands for Second Language Learning and is sometimes used instead of SLA.

In the essay co-written with James Lantolf, Pavlenko uses language memoirs to assesses the appropriateness of the metaphor of "participation", which had recently been introduced in SLA research. Being aware that she was writing in a tradition in which "the subjective first person singular remains a suspect genre" (1998: 3), she lends support to her methodology by reminding the reader that postmodernism has "dismantled" the notion of "impartial objectivity" and that "all is left is situated subjectivities" (1998: 4). Postmodernism has challenged the possibility of knowing universal truths. Autobiographies, therefore, should not be regarded as unreliable data but just as a viewpoint amongst many.

The post-2000 phase involves acknowledging the literary nature of language memoirs by using insights from literary theory, without, however, denying that language memoirs are valuable epistemological resources for SLA. This phase includes writings by both Kramsch and Pavlenko. Kramsch and Pavlenko address the issue of methodology in different ways. Kramsch draws from language memoirs to posit the existence of the "multilingual subject". The multilingual subject is someone who has developed enhanced cognitive and semiotic skills thanks to second language learning. When learning a second language, Kramsch argues, people become aware of the link between language and affect (2009: 26-40) and develop "analogical thinking", a cognitive faculty that allows them to make "unconventional associations" based on the shape of words, their sounds and their similarities with other words (2009: 30-31). Kramsch address the issue of reliability by inserting warnings about the literariness of language memoirs. She recursively reminds the reader that language memoirs are not factual data but "*ex post facto* reconstructions of events" that may not have occurred to the narrator in exactly the same way as described (2004: 2; 2009: 5, 32), that they satisfy the requirements of generic conventions (2009: 5, 73) and that their authors are skilled literary writers whose experiences may not reflect those of ordinary learners (2004: 9; 2009: 48, 73).

Pavlenko is more specific than Kramsch. In "Language Learning Memoirs as a Gendered Genre" (2001a), "'In the world of tradition I was unimagined': Negotiations of Identities in Cross-Cultural Autobiographies" (2001b) and "Narrative Study: Whose Story Is It, Anyway?" (2002), she explains that language memoirs should not be used as unproblematic data because they only reflect the experiences of a narrow bracket of language learners (2001a: 237; 2002: 217). Using a corpus of contemporary memoirs about learning English as a second language written by American bilingual writers, she argues that

language memoirs represent the language learning experiences of upper/middle-class female scholars (Pavlenko 2001a:224; Pavlenko 2001b: 339) who have been influenced by "[postmodernism's] obsessive fixation on language […] as the main site of the world and identity construction" (Pavlenko 2001a: 216). Language memoirs, in other words, follow the script set by well-known postmodern thinkers such as Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and Kristeva (Pavlenko 2001a: 216-217). Further, she argues that the language memoir is a "gendered genre". In the corpus she considers, there are more female writers than male ones (2001a: 222; Pavlenko 2001b: 322) as well as stark differences between the themes they engage. While memoirs by male authors construct an autobiographical self who "conquers" language through individual efforts and hard work, memoirs by female authors construct a self who learns language through friendship and collaboration with others (Pavlenko 2001a: 232; Pavlenko 2001b: 322).

Pavlenko also notes that reflections on the affective consequences of language acquisition are a specific feature of American autobiographies written in the second half of the twentieth century. Other contexts produce other kinds of narratives. Contemporary South Korean autobiographies, for instance, focus on "language learning strategies and on the development of linguistic […] competence" (2001a: 216) while American autobiographies written in the early twentieth century concentrate on "cultural assimilation, 'marrying in', and appropriation of material benefits" (Pavlenko 2001a: 216). As a result of all these factors, Pavlenko urges SLA scholars to elicit the stories of learners from sociocultural backgrounds other than those that typically feature in language memoirs by published writers (2001a: 237; 2002: 217).

Both Kramsch and Pavlenko provide frameworks that ask SLA researchers to approach language memoirs by using tools and insights from literary theory and criticism. Their frameworks are a response to the disciplinary requirements of the social sciences (scientific methodologies, objectivity, Cartesian roots) and may not be helpful to literary critics who are already familiar with literary theory and who do not question that literature is connected to extra-textual reality via ideology and history. Nevertheless, Pavlenko's framework corroborates an idea which has appeared recursively in the present discussion of the language learner approach, that is, the importance of subject positioning and of historical contextualisation. Who the learner/author is, his/her status as a language user and a literate being and when, where, and how language acquisition took place are an

integral part of representations of language learning and should be taken into account when interpreting them whether these are conceived as language memoirs, cross-cultural autobiographies, language learner narratives, ethnic autobiographies, or otherwise.

1.2 *The translation approach*[7]

With the term "translation approach", I will refer to a form of literary criticism that shares some of the characteristics of the language learner approach in that it concentrates on representations of language learners without positing literacy as an integral, and yet distinct, aspect of language learning. However, what I term the translation approach focusses on a specific category of language learners, that is, migrants who are learning the language of the host country. Further, it is more attuned to the role of ideology than the language learner approach since it explicitly frames language acquisition as a phenomenon informed by the "process of maintaining domination" (Thompson 1984: 4).

The main goal of this approach is to broaden widely accepted definitions of "translation". For most ordinary people and, even, for most translation experts, the word "translation" conjures up a translator/interpreter who takes a source text in one language (also known as "the original") and renders it in a different language, thus creating a target text, or "a translation". "Translation", therefore, denotes both a *process* involving texts and human beings proficient in more than one language and the final *product* of this process, i.e. the translation/target text. In specialist parlance, translation between languages is often referred to as "interlingual translation", a term coined by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson in his essay "On Aspects of Linguistic Translation" (1959/1992: 145).

Translation studies scholar Maria Tymoczko, who terms the conceptualisation of translation just described "the ordinary-language sense of translation" (2007: 56) and "the common-sense notion of translation" (2007: 56), has argued that central to it is the idea of "transfer" and "fidelity" to the original/source text. Translation, in other words, is often conceptualised as the "faithful transfer" of the source text's meaning into the target text

[7] A term that could have been used instead of "translation approach" is "self-translation approach" since, as we shall see, self-translation plays an important role. However, since the proponents of the language learner approach also use this term to refer to quite different phenomena, I use "translation approach" to avoid confusion.

(2007: 54, 68). Through the analysis of representations of migrant language learners, the translation approach seeks to garner evidence of a process-centred model of interlingual translation in which products (targets texts) and fidelity to the source text's meaning are not a precondition for translation. In this model, translators and texts are replaced with the figure of the migrant and his/her experiences with languages.

The translation approach as it is outlined here is an extrapolation from a corpus of works by translation studies scholars: *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (1997/1999) by Naoki Sakai, the essay "Translation and Migration" by Loredana Polezzi (2012) and the project *Transnationalising Modern Languages* (TML). I have defined it as an "extrapolation" because these works do not draw on each other to build their frameworks in the same way that, say, Pavlenko draws on Kaplan's "On Language Memoir" to theorise self-translation. Moreover, neither Sakai nor Polezzi nor TML makes organic links between literature, representations of language acquisition and redefinitions of translation. Sakai takes a literary text (*Dictée* [1982] by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, which will be discussed later) and explicitly considers the representations of language acquisition therein to enlarge the meaning of translation, but does not strike a general argument about how representations of language acquisition and translation can mutually inform each other. Sakai just sees in the text evidence that lends support to his theories about translation. In her essay, Polezzi openly states that literature is a "pertinent source of information on how questions of language and translation enter the life of the migrant" (Polezzi 2013: 351) but she does not explicitly cast the texts that she considers as being about language acquisition, or literacy. TML binds a broader conceptualisation of translation to language learning, literacy, education, and multimodality, but it does not posit literary texts as the main source of enlarged notions of translation. Sakai, Polezzi, and TML express complementary ideas driven by a common goal and, when these ideas are brought together, they can be said to delineate a theoretical framework for reading literacy texts about language learning and literacy.

Highlighting the interrelation between literature, language acquisition, literacy, education and multimodality is beneficial not only for the purpose of this thesis (which is built on the premise that these elements are never far from each other) but also for attempts at enlarging the meaning of translation. Such attempts have drawn fire from some translation studies scholars who have argued that they are purely theoretical disquisitions

that lack empirical evidence which justifies the use of the word "translation" (e.g. Trivedi 2007; Pym 2014). Language acquisition and literacy provide a tangible, language-based, context within which to insert broader conceptualisations of translation. In what follows, I discuss Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity,* Polezzi's "Migration and Translation" and the TML project. I will illustrate in more detail why Sakai and Polezzi argue that enlarging translation is important, the interpretive framework endemic in their works and why some translation studies scholars have taken issue with the broadening of translation.

Translation and Subjectivity is a book that mounts a critique of "interlingual translation" (1997/1999: 1-4). "Interlingual translation" is a term coined by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1959/1992: 145) and coincides with "the common-sense notion of translation" (Tymoczko 2007: 56). It refers to a process involving two different texts and two different national/natural languages, one for the source text (the source language) and one for the target text (the target language) (1997/1999: 10, 16). Sakai argues that such a model is ideological because it reinforces the belief that a "homogenous language society" and self-contained national languages are the norm (1997/1999: 3-4). For Sakai, the norm is linguistic heterogeneity produced by factors such as migrations, colonialism, displacement and the coexistence of various dialects, sociolects and nonstandard languages (1997/1999: 18-19, 51-52). Sakai calls communicative exchanges that assume a homogenous language society examples of "homolingual address" (1997/1999: 3-4), while exchanges that assume linguistic heterogeneity are described as instances of "heterolingual address". By drawing on the birth of Japanese as a national language in the eighteenth century, Sakai argues that, in Japan, the monolingual address was brought about by the formation of the Japanese nation-state and its concomitant education system and that translation has, ever since, served nationalist and educational agendas (1997/1999: 3, 20-25).

In his book, Sakai envisages a new definition of translation more consonant with the heterolingual address. He argues that translation is the province of ordinary language users (rather than translators) (1997/1999: 10) and defines it as "the work of labour that is required to move from one language to another" (1997/1999: 26). Sakai envisages translation not as a product, as "a work that is produced and completed within one language unit" (1997/1999: 26), but as a process. On the one hand, the words "work" and "labour" suggest that translation takes place when language users who speak more than one language encounter a linguistic difficulty/barrier which needs to be overcome. On the

other hand, Sakai offers a less intuitive definition by discussing *Dictée* (1982), a semi-autobiographical experimental novel by Korean-American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

Dictée tells the stories of several women, including Joan of Arc, Cha herself and Cha's mother. Their stories illustrate the injustices inflicted on them by institutions and the difficulties of displacement and migration. Cha's mother, for instance, was the daughter of Korean exiles, while Cha emigrated from Korea to the U.S. in the 1960s. *Dictée* mixes different languages (e.g. French, English, Greek) with Chinese characters, it juxtaposes pieces of prose with photographs and quotations from other sources so that "the reader is made unsure of which language *Dictée* as a whole is written in" (Sakai 1997/1999: 26). Sakai presents *Dictée* both as a book that challenges "the stable configuration of national languages" and as a book about language acquisition: "[*Dictée*] addresses itself to the problematic of language learning […]" (1997/1999: 25). Like Besemeres and Pavlenko, Sakai posits a correlation between the theme of language acquisition and the status of the author as a migrant. He suggests, in fact, that it is Cha's position as a Korean-American immigrant that engenders "the problematic of language acquisition" in the text (1997/1999: 25).[8]

Although Sakai argues that the novel is about language acquisition, it is conventionally received as a text about "poststructuralist subjectivity and postnationalism", as a challenge to "unified subjectivity and reactionary nationalism" and as an endorsement of "fragmented, heterogenous, multiple subject-formations" (Kim 2008: 163). On the one hand, these readings may be due to an overall neglect, within criticism, of issues of language learning; on the other, it should be noted that, in this book, representations of language learning are not central and are not narrated mimetically as, say, in *French Lessons* but, rather, evoked through allusion. Consequently, it is easier to overlook them. Nevertheless, they are a prominent aspect of the book. The title of the novel itself, for instance, is a French word which means "dictation". A dictation is a very popular classroom task in France where it is used to test grammatical and orthographic accuracy of native speakers of French and of second language learners alike. It dates from at least the nineteenth century and has

[8] Both Besemeres and Pavlenko put forward generic labels for texts that address language learning (e.g. cross-cultural autobiography). Sakai does not since he is not interested in theorising a genre. *Dictée* is just a means that, via representations of language acquisition, enables him to exemplify a new conceptualisation of translation.

ideological roots in that it was used to inculcate standard French and to stamp out regional *patois* (Weber in Graff 1987: 275). The novel also reproduces translation and grammar exercises usually found in second language coursebooks (in Sakai 1997/1999: 27) as well as a dictation from French into English (Cha 1982: 1).

For Sakai, these language exercises are examples of the "the work of labour required to move from one language to another" and, therefore, of translation. Dictations and grammar exercises exemplify translation because the migrant language learner becomes aware of "a power relation inherent in the translation of a language into another, as well as in the situation of the foreign-language instruction" (1997/1999: 27). Translation thus coincides with a realisation, via the language acquisition context, of the relation between language and ideology. The migrant language learner, Sakai observes, becomes aware that what is at stake in learning a language is not meaning and self-expression (what one wants to say) but the maintenance of standard languages, their grammar rules and, consequently, of the homolingual address (1997/1999: 27). Translation thus becomes an awareness and first-hand experience of the extent to which language can be used to form and reinforce ideology.

To sum up: in *Translation and Subjectivity*, Sakai attempts to enlarge the ordinary-language sense of translation. Sakai defines translation as "the work of labour required to move from one language to another". In this new definition, translators and texts in different languages are replaced with ordinary language users, migrants, and first-hand experience of the relation between language and ideology. To illustrate in more detail what "the work of labour required to move from one language to another" entails, Sakai takes a literary text written by a migrant writer and explicitly focusses on the allusions to second language acquisition that it contains. These allusions consist of reproductions of (traditional) translation exercises, grammar exercises and dictations. Due to this specific focus on "the problematic of language learning", *Translation and Subjectivity* can be said to provide a theoretical framework for interpreting texts about language acquisition. Sakai's framework asks the critic to identify representations of/allusions to the second language classroom in which the learner becomes aware of the ideological nature of language and language education.

Although Sakai does not state it explicitly, the framework that he proposes is also applicable to representations of literacy. Dictations, translations and grammar exercises all

require the ability to read and write and to decode print. They are also used to test proficiency in foreign language reading and writing. This suggests that literacy is endemic in "the work of labour required to move from one language to another" and, consequently, in translation (as Sakai defines it). Moreover, it confirms the hypothesis that language learning and literacy are part of the same paradigm and never far from each other.

Loredana Polezzi's essay "Translation and Migration" (2012) is another attempt at enlarging "the common-sense notion of translation" (Tymoczko 2007: 56) by analysing texts about language acquisition. "Translation and Migration" was published in the journal *Translation Studies* where it served as a "position paper", as a piece inviting responses from scholars and readers. The question addressed is the widespread use of the term "translation" as a trope (a metaphor) that can shed light on the dynamics of migration. We came across one such use when discussing Besemeres's concept of self-translation. Besemeres's self-translation does not refer to texts in different languages but to an identity formation process proper to migrant language learners which involves the loss and the gain of key identitarian aspects following the acquisition of a second language. Besemeres derives self-translation from yet another metaphorical use of this word in association with migration, namely, the title of Hoffman's language memoir – *Lost in Translation*. In this book, it is Hoffman herself who is "lost in translation". Hoffman (a Polish native speaker) draws an analogy between learning English as a second language and interlingual translation (1989/1991: 106-107). The analogy hinges on the question of "loss". Hoffman (like Besemeres) suggests that learning a second language causes the loss of key aspect of one's identity just as a translating a written text always entails a degree of loss of meaning.

Polezzi discusses metaphorical uses of translation because they pose a challenge for translation studies. Translation studies is an empirical discipline founded on the analysis of tangible textual and linguistic translations (Holmes 1975/1988: 71). Metaphorical uses of translation tend to make texts redundant by replacing them with human beings/migrants as the focus of critical attention. As I will explain, for some translation scholars, this is problematic since it erodes the very foundations of the discipline and raises the question of the discipline's future. The demise of translation studies may seem a far-fetched scenario. At the same time, it is undeniable that metaphorical uses of translation are very different from the ordinary-language sense of translation and could change the way translation is

conceptualised. Moreover, they have been endorsed by high-profile writers and scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

For instance, Salman Rushdie, reflecting on British Indian writers who (like himself) were born in India but moved to Britain and wrote in English, dovetails translation with migration on etymological grounds: "The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (1982/1991: 17). Here, the association between translation and migration hinges, of course, on languages and cultures but, more specifically, on the idea of movement. Translation expresses the idea of movement through its etymology and the target text's "travels beyond their original language environments" (Gamsa 2011: 555), while the migrant performs it physically, by moving from one country to another. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha uses the phrase "cultural translation" to refer to the impact of migrant artists and ordinary migrants on the host country's culture (1994: 10-11; 303-337). Bhabha argues that both groups bring "newness" to dominant cultures and world-views and that this is an example of "cultural translation" (1994: 303-337, 353). Artists perform cultural translation through their artefacts, migrants in general perform it through their presence in the host country. Cultural translation draws on the web of associations that underlie Rushdie's ideas since Bhabha defines it by stressing the migrants' travels from one place (usually the nation) to another (1994: 7).

Alongside high-profile figures who employ "translation" metaphorically and translation scholars who advocate an enlargement of translation on ideological and ethical grounds , there are also researchers who have posited a hierarchy in which translation (understood in its conventional sense) and translation studies are ancillary to metaphorical uses of translation. In the essay "Cultural Translation of Interventions: Diabetes Care in American Samoa" (DePue and others 2010), a team of health care experts argues that research on diabetes care carried out in academic settings may be ineffective in the low-income communities of Samoa due to "limited access [to care], health workers shortages, underfinanced health systems, and cultural and language factors" (DePue and others 2010: 2085). The solution, they argue, is "cultural translation". DePue and others understand "cultural translation" as a revision of academy-based research by means of a pragmatic appraisal of the material living conditions of patients. The authors maintain that their interventions "would strengthen the science of translation" and that "cultural adaptation

brings yet another dimension to translation research" (DePue and others 2010: 2085). Here, translation studies and the traditional meaning of translation lose their specificity and become a secondary ramification of something which is referred to as cultural translation.

Essays like "Cultural Translation of Interventions", statements such as "We are translated men" have sparked concerns amongst translation scholars. Harish Trivedi, for instance, has argued that divorcing translation from texts in different languages will strengthen the dominance of English: "[T]here is an urgent need […] for some old and old-fashioned literary translation. For, if such bilingual bicultural ground is eroded away, we shall sooner than later end up with a wholly translated, monolingual, monocultural, monolithic world" (2007: 286).Tymoczko and Anthony Pym have taken issue with the theoretical foundations of discussions of cultural translation. Tymoczko acknowledges that cultural translation and interlingual/textual translation share a word ("translation") whose Latin etymology (*trānsferre*) means "to bear/carry across" and that interlingual/textual translation evokes the idea of travel. Nevertheless, she argues that they cannot be said to afford insights into phenomena that involve the movement of people across geographical borders: "It is dubious at best to use the literal aspect of the term translation to describe diasporic cultural processes, but it impossible to justify applying the metalevel theory about textual translation [...] on the grounds of a shared lexical exponent" (2010: 107).

In a 2010 piece, Pym argued that discussions about cultural translation consist of theorical speculations lacking empirical evidence (Pym 2010: n.p.). In a later piece, he noted (like Tymoczko) that the link between translation studies and cultural translation only hinges on a piece of vocabulary (i.e. "translation") and, therefore, is too tenuous to impact translation research (2014: 155). For Pym, discussions of cultural translation have more to do with interactions between cultures than languages and texts and, therefore, "would be better branded as 'intercultural studies'" (Pym 2014: 159). Moreover, he stresses that any enlargement of translation should be rooted in the study of "products" (texts) (2014: 155, 159) because not doing so will turn translation studies into "a drunken boat" (2014: 153).[9] Notwithstanding this negative assessment, Pym concedes that discussions about cultural translation have advantages for translation research. Since, due to migration "we can no longer assume separate languages and cultures", cultural translation "offer[s] ways of

[9] For more assessments of "cultural translation" by translation scholars, see the forum in *Translation Studies* (2009) 2(2) and 3(1) and *Translation Studies* (2010) 3(3).

thinking about the many situations in which translation now operates in the world" (Pym 2014: 156).[10] Pym, in other words, concedes that there is scope for a broadening of translation since common-sense definitions of translation are out of step with linguistic interactions in contexts marked by migration and the mixing of languages.

Within translation studies, an important contribution to this issue comes from Maria Tymoczko and her book *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (2007). Like Sakai, Tymoczko mounts a critique of "the ordinary-language sense of translation (2007: 56). Tymoczko argues that this is both Eurocentric and ideological. For instance, since the end of the Middle Ages, many scholars and practitioners of translations have theorised translation by extrapolating from the Latin etymology of words such as "traduzione" (Italian), Übersetzung (German) and, of course, the English "translation" (Tymoczko 2007: 6, 66). These are all words from European languages and that originate from the Latin *trānsferre* (to bear across) and its synonyms. Consequently, they can all convey the idea of "faithful transfer" which underpins the common-sense notion of translation (2007: 6). However, words in other languages convey different ideas. The words *tapia* and *kowa* from the Nigerian language Igbo, for instance, convey "storytelling" and "deconstruction [of the source text]" (2007: 71); consequently, they can lead to a different conceptualisation of translation (e.g. one which could include "rewritings") (2007: 109). Tymoczko also argues that the ordinary-language sense of translation established itself in connection with historical dynamics which served to reinforce the power of Europe and the U.S. over other geopolitical players. These include the rise of European and North American nation-states which bound the nation to one language, their concomitant imperialist enterprises which posited "a hierarchical relationship of languages and cultures" (Tymoczko 2007: 57; Tymoczko 2010: 108), and Bible translation which aligned translation with "literacy practices (as opposed as to oral translation practices still predominant in most of the world)" (2007: 57).[11]

[10] For a similar assessment of cultural translation, see Simon (2009: 209).

[11] Here, Tymoczko uses "literacy practice", a key word in this thesis which, following Street, I use to refer to culturally embedded ways of using literacy. Tymoczko does not mention Street's work and "literacy practice" means, in all probability, "written texts"/"a tendency to conceptualise translation as involving written texts". Nevertheless, there are intersections between "literacy", "translation" and "literacy practice" as Street intends it. Translation can be viewed as a "literacy practice" since it enables communication between humans by means of reading and writing. Furthermore, historically, there is a link between the spread of literacy and interlingual translation. For instance, changes in the language used for classroom instruction (e.g. the shift from Latin to vernaculars) was aided by the translation of key educational texts (Graff 1987: 80). Christian

These characteristics make the common-sense notion of translation too narrow a foundation for translation studies, a discipline which has now achieved "international" status (2007: 57) and which is ultimately concerned with human communication in a wide variety of contexts (2007: 30). In Tymoczko's view, the ordinary-language sense of translation should be replaced with a "cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, cultural-concept" which enlarges translation beyond the constraints of imposed by Eurocentric frameworks and which includes "all translation products and processes in translation". Doing this would have many benefits both for the discipline – e.g. a "recalibration" of translation methodologies and pedagogy, a greater "internationalisation" of the field (2007: 189) – and for translators, who can start to "perceive the full range of possibilities of their profession" – e.g. "furthering the aims of […] literary movements", "changes in diverse cultural systems" (2007: 189).

Polezzi's essay "Translation and Migration" inserts itself in the research directions explored by Tymoczko and sketched by Pym. Although its main aim is to mediate between metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses of translation, it can also be read as an attempt to enlarge translation beyond the constraints imposed by Eurocentric frameworks (Tymoczko 2007) and to highlight "the many situations in which translation now operates in the world" (Pym 2014: 156). However, unlike Pym, Polezzi argues that source and target texts are *not* a *sine qua non* of translation:

> Once we consider the mobility of people as well as that of texts, the linear notion of translation as something that happens to an original (usually a written document which already exists as such in a specified language) as it moves across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries becomes largely insufficient. Translation takes place not just when words move on their own, but also and mostly, when people move into new social and linguistic settings. (2012: 348)

missionaries often invented scripts for oral indigenous languages which were then taught to enable indigenous populations to read the Bible and to facilitate conversion (e.g. Fenton and Moon 2002: 31-32; Rafael 1993).

Polezzi calls the ordinary-language sense of translation based on source and target texts "linear notions of translation" (2012: 348) and, like Tymoczko, argues that they are too narrow. Translation, for Polezzi, is much broader and is performed by ordinary language users as they "move into new social and linguistic settings" (2012: 348).

Polezzi refers to her broader view of translation as "non-linear translation" (2012: 350). Non-linear translation entails generic contacts with different languages: "Migrants will almost inevitably come into contact with translation but that contact can take different forms, anything from informal everyday interactions to potentially life-changing encounters with the health or legal systems" (2012: 348). These generic contacts do not exclude translation in its conventional sense, but they also include contexts that produce language barriers and the ways in which migrants address them (2012: 348). A factor that is likely to constitute a barrier is lack of linguistic proficiency: "Single individuals as well as communities will need to move between different languages, of which they may have varying degrees of command" (2012: 348). The implication here is that the less migrants are proficient in the host language, the more barriers and, consequently, the more non-linear translations they will encounter/perform.

Polezzi sometimes uses the term "self-translation" to refer to non-linear translation. We came across self-translation when discussing the language learner approach, where it referred to an identity formation process triggered by second language learning. "Self-translation" is also used in translation studies research where it has another meaning. Sometimes termed "auto-translation", self-translation denotes "the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself" (Popovič in Shuttleworth and Cowie 2014: 13). An example of self-translation may be Samuel Beckett's translations of his own works from French into English.

Although Polezzi is a translation scholar, she assigns a variety of different meanings to "self-translation". She uses it to denote a translation that goes on in the mind of the migrant, real-life situations in which the migrant is required to take on the role of translator for himself/herself and others, real-life situations in which the migrant has to overcome a language barrier, and situations that highlight the ideological nature of translation and language (Polezzi 2012: 348-350). Polezzi, in a manner reminiscent of Kaplan, turns to literary texts to look for evidence of self-translation and, in particular, to "migrant writing". Polezzi defines migrant writing as "literature written in a host language

and connected to experiences of migration" (2012: 350-351). Migrant writing is neither strictly autobiographical (like the language memoir) nor specifically issued from colonialism (Polezzi 2012: 355*n*). In migrant writing, self-translation takes the shape of subjective reflections on **(a)** living with multiple languages, **(b)** writing in an adopted language, **(c)** self-translating/auto-translating one's work (2012: 350-351) and **(d)** on the relation between languages, affect, and ideology: "For some [writers], the dominant experience is that of loss, or even betrayal (of a mother tongue, a home community, a native tradition). For others, however, to move across languages marks a greater freedom and a wider choice" (2012: 351).

When discussing migrant writing and self-translation, Polezzi does not explicitly mention representation of language acquisition and literacy. Nevertheless, these are implicit in her argument since she explains that lack of "command" (mastery, proficiency) is a fertile ground for non-linear translation: "Single individuals as well as communities will need to move between different languages, of which they may have *varying degrees of command* […]" (2012: 348, my italics). "Command" is one of the goals of language learning and literacy; these latter, therefore, are likely to impact how and why self-translation takes place.[12] Moreover, migrant writing includes texts that can be classified as cross-cultural autobiography and language memoirs, two genres which focus on issues of language acquisition and, consequently, of literacy.

The connection between migrant writing, self-translation, language acquisition and literacy can be seen more clearly seen if we consider one of the texts that Polezzi examines, namely, the autobiographical essay "Translated by the author: My life in between languages" (2009) by Kenyan writer Ngũgi wa Thiong'o. Ngũgi has auto-translated some of his books in his first language (Gĩkũyũ) into English and describes this process in the essay. Ngũgi writes of an "exercise in mental translation" from Gĩkũyũ when composing in English (Ngũgi in Polezzi 2012: 350). For Polezzi, Ngũgi's "mental translations" constitute

[12] "Translation and Migration" generated a forum that spanned three consecutive issues of *Translation Studies*. Edwin Gentzler praised Polezzi for "a radical redefinition of what is called translation" and "what kind of 'texts' translation studies should study" (2013: 344); for Boris Buden, Polezzi's essay is an "antidote for an overly metaphorical use of the idea of translation" (2013: 364-365). In the forum, language learning is only mentioned in the responses by Buden and Yazmin Yildiz (2013). Both suggest that migrants who enter the host country are also likely to become language learners and that translation (understood in its conventional sense of communication from one language to another) can aid language acquisition. However, neither Buden nor Yildiz establishes an organic link between translation (of any kind) and language learning (Buden 2013: 36; Yildiz 2013: 117).

evidence of self-translation since they are reflections on **(b)** writing in an adopted language and on **(c)** auto-translating one's work. However, "Translated by the author" also contains self-translation in the shape of **(d)** reflections on the relation between language, affect, and ideology. These can be identified by examining representations of language acquisition and literacy.

In his essay, Ngũgi explains that when he started learning English at school, he soon realised that its acquisition "was based on a coercive system of rewards and terror" (2009: 18) aimed at stamping out Gĩkũyũ (2009: 18). Ngũgĩ laments the denigration of his first language and disapproves of the methods used to enforce English. At the same time, his disapproval is mixed with an inner conflict. The author suggests that he himself contributed to the dominance of English by privileging this latter in his Gĩkũyũ-speaking church:

> [O]nce I learned English, I, along with other English neophytes, would carry an English Bible to church. The preacher would still read his chosen passages in Gĩkũyũ but we would follow the same passages through our English-language Bible. We would thus be hearing Gĩkũyũ sounds, as read by the preacher, through the English literary text we read silently. (2009: 18)

The word "neophyte" (someone who is being initiated into a religious order) points to the existence of power structures maintained not only by language/s but also by Ngũgĩ himself. Further, the contrast that Ngũgĩ sets up between "Gĩkũyũ sounds" and "silent, literary, English print" suggests that literacy and semiotic modes are integral to the maintenance of such structures.

Some of the meanings that Polezzi assigns to self-translation can therefore be elicited by examining representations of literacy and language acquisition. Acknowledging this crossover is productive because it pins down a specific and tangible context for non-linear translation and reduces the risk of overly metaphorical uses. Furthermore, since Ngũgĩ's essay brings together references to various semiotic modes alongside language and language-as-writing, it could be argued that multimodality plays an important role and that enlarged conceptualisations of translation should be viewed less as "interlingual" (involving

different natural/national languages) than "intersemiotic" (involving different semiotic modes).

"Intersemiotic translation" is a well-known concept in translation studies. Like "interlingual translation", it was coined by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson in his essay "On Aspects of Linguistic Translation" (1959/1992) where it is defined as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (1959/1992: 145). Jakobson's definition implies that the direction of intersemiotic translation is *always* from the linguistic (e.g. a book) to the non-linguistic (e.g. music, pictures). However, as Gideon Toury has noted, Jakobson's typology is rather "crude" (1986: 1113) and other directions are possible. For example, intersemiotic translation can occur from the non-linguistic to the linguistic and between two different semiotic modes, "whether one is verbal or not" (Toury 1986: 1113).

In "Translation and Migration", Polezzi does not explicitly mention either multimodality or the intersemiotic dimension of self-translation. However, this emerges from *Transnationalising Modern Languages* (TML), a large research project which ran from 2014 to 2017 and which involved U.K. universities and international partners.[13] Subtitled *Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures*, TML sought to understand how cultures and languages interact by studying how Italian culture and the Italian language have spread across the world for the past 150 years. Its goal was to impact modern languages pedagogy by providing a new praxis that posits languages and cultures as transnational, that is, as phenomena that exceed national boundaries and that can only be learned by studying their interactions with other cultures and languages.

Within TML, "translation" is used both in its conventional sense and in Bhabha's sense of cultural translation, i.e. cultural exchanges between ordinary people who cross geographical boundaries ("Transnationalising Modern Languages: Project" 2014-17). TML posits "learning" as one of the main factors that brings about translation. Learning is understood as *language* learning but also as the acquisition of skills and knowledge of any

[13] TML was funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the *Translating Cultures Theme*. *Translating Cultures* sought to understand "communication within, between, and across diverse cultures" through the lens of **"**translation, understood in its broadest sense, in the transmission, interpretation, transformation and sharing of languages, values, beliefs, histories and narratives" (*AHRC Translating Cultures Theme* <http://translatingcultures.org.uk/about/ahrc-translating-cultures-theme/> [accessed 1 October 2020]).

kind and is always conceived as multimodal: “Language is an important medium for learning and communication, but it isn’t the only one. People use other cultural resources to find ways of creatively and imaginatively transforming what they know already and what they find” (“Transnationalising Modern Languages: Learning” 2014-17). Learning is viewed as multimodal and since learning is connected to translation, it could be argued that TML works with an intersemiotic conceptualisation of translation.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the handmade books created by a group of women under the supervision of TML researchers. The women all lived in Scotland but had a transnational background with connections to other countries and continents. The books tell their life-stories through “dry etching, gelatine prints, photographs, maps, embroidered letters, stitched writing, printed writing in different languages, parts of the books sewn together” (“Transnationalising Modern Languages: Making Books” 2014-17). In an analysis of the books made at TML event, applied linguist Li Wei[14] argues that they show the extent to which language acquisition and literacy are “always a multimodal and multisensory experience” (2015: 30’ 18’’). When learning to read and write the alphabet, Wei observes, one has to engage the sound of words as well as their graphic image. Overall, the goal of the books was to have the participants express similar ideas by means of different semiotic modes and, therefore, can be said to be underpinned by an intersemiotic definition of translation.[15]

Within the field of translation studies, Sakai’s *Translation and Subjectivity* and Polezzi’s “Translation and Migration” form a line of thought which seeks to broaden common-sense conceptualisations of translation by using literary texts by migrant writers.

[14] Although Li Wei contributed to a TML event, he was one of the researchers working on a sister project also funded by an AHRC grant under the *Translating Cultures Theme*. The project with which Li Wei was associate was “Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating linguistic and cultural transformations in superdiverse wards in four UK cities”. This project was an ethnographic investigation of “multilingual interactions” between people from “superdiverse” cities (<http://translatingcultures.org.uk/awards/large-grants/translation-and-translanguaging-investigating-linguistic-and-cultural-transformations-in-superdiverse-wards-in-four-uk-cities/> [accessed 1 October 2020])

[15] Outside of TML and translation studies, the link between intersemiotic translation, literacy and education has been highlighted by social semiotician Gunther Kress in the essay “Genres and the Multimodal Production of ‘Scientificness’” (2008). This essay analyses a science classroom in a UK secondary school where the teacher instructs the students to render scientific information through a combination of drawings (image) and writing. Kress’s goal is to understand how knowledge is reconfigured as it is “moved from one mode to another” (2008: 173). Kress calls this process “transduction”. Transduction can be defined as an example of an enlarged model of translation linked to ordinary language users, multimodality and literacy.

These works formulate definitions of translation which involve migrants who daily negotiate more than one language (rather than professional translators) and which are concerned with the processes underpinning the migrants' linguistic negotiations (rather than target texts/products). Translation thus is typically redrawn as subjective reflections on the language barriers which the migrant faces and as experiences that increase the migrant's awareness of the relation between language and ideology. Language and natural/national languages remain the mainstay of these "new" definitions of translation but, as TML suggests, multimodality and languages' interaction with other semiotic modes also play a part. As a result, it is reasonable to argue that enlarged definitions of translation lend themselves to being understood through an intersemiotic lens.

Representations of language acquisition and literacy play an important role in the texts that Sakai and Polezzi discuss to enlarge translation. Consequently, taken together, their works can be said to form a theoretical framework for interpreting this type of representation which I have called the "translation approach". Nevertheless, neither Sakai nor Polezzi explicitly acknowledges their potential as an epistemological tool for translation research. Sakai is aware that he draws on representations of language acquisition, but this does not lead to general statements about the extent to which representations of language acquisition can become tools to broaden translation; furthermore, he neglects the role of literacy within language acquisition. Polezzi makes grander claims for the role of literature *vis-à-vis* translation but she frames representations of literacy and language acquisition as narratives about language and languages. Moreover, they both focus primarily on migrants who are learning the language of their host country. As a result, their frameworks may cause the critic to align language acquisition solely with second language acquisition and to neglect representations which involve a different typology of learner and learning (e.g. learning to *read* and *write* your first language).

Because it privileges migrant learners and because the relation between language, language acquisition and literacy is not fully disentangled, the translation approach is only marginally useful for literary criticism and is unlikely to produce fully satisfactory interpretations. The approach that acknowledges that (in literature as in real life) language, language acquisition and literacy are never far from each other and that considers a wider typology of learners is what I call the "literacy narrative approach" and it is to this approach that we now turn.

1.3 The literacy narrative approach

In the foregoing sections, I have argued that the language learner approach and the translation approach are both concerned with the figure of the language learner but that they do not posit language acquisition to be sufficiently distinct from literacy to warrant an *ad hoc* treatment. I have also argued that the translation approach highlights aspects of the sociohistorical and ideological dimension of language learning, an issue which either neglected (as in Kaplan's "On Language Memoir") or mentioned cursorily (as in Besemeres's *Translating One's Self*) in the language learner approach. The approach that I outline in this section, which I have termed the "literacy narrative approach", is also concerned with the figure of the language learner but distinguishes between language acquisition and literacy; furthermore, it systematically foregrounds the role of ideology. Put differently, the goal of this approach is to insert the learner into a broad landscape made of power struggles and history in order to establish how literary representations reproduce and/or challenge ideological constructions of literacy and language acquisition. To achieve this, it focusses on the factors that make language learning and literacy possible (e.g. teachers, families, institutions, classrooms, reading, writing and other semiotic modes), it highlights conflicts between them and assesses how they are shaped by the historical and social context that produced them.

The literacy narrative approach is a reformulation of the 1992 essay "Reading Literacy Narratives" by Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen. "Reading Literacy Narratives" was published in *College English*, a journal that specialises in literature, critical theory, creative writing theory, pedagogy, literacy and composition studies. Composition studies is a subject taught in U.S. colleges and universities. Students who take this subject learn the generic conventions of fiction and non-fiction and practise writing different genres. At the time Eldred and Mortensen wrote their essay, the topic of literacy and language acquisition in literature was receiving a great deal of attention from composition studies. However, discussions lacked a shared vocabulary (Young 2004: 202), and, due to a then-recent split from the English department, composition studies scholars were not using useful insights from contemporary literary theory and criticism (Eldred 2018: private correspondence). In "Reading Literacy Narratives", Eldred and Mortensen give a shape to these discussions.

They provide a label for representations of language acquisition and literacy – "literacy narrative" – and a detailed interpretive framework applicable to a wide range of texts, from literature to "those narratives that academic discussions of literacy produce" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 513).

"Reading Literacy Narrative" has had a deep impact on composition studies and U.S. literary studies. The term "literacy narrative" now denotes a fully-fledged genre subsuming literary texts that address language acquisition and literacy (e.g. Young 2004; Launius 2009; Pari-Pfisterer 2011). Students who take composition studies are often required to write an autobiographical literacy narrative as part of their assessment ("ENGL 101 Literacy Narrative Unit" 2020; Corkery 2005; Blake Scott 1997). Furthermore, the Ohio State University has set up the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN). The brainchild of Cynthia Selfe and Lewis Hulman, the DALN gathers "personal literacy narratives in a variety of formats (text, video, audio)" (Comer and Harker 2015: 65). The DALN contains over 3,500 literacy narratives by people from very diverse sociocultural backgrounds (Comer and Harker 2015:65). The goal is to provide "a historical record of literacy practices and of values of contributors, as those practices and values change" (Comer and Harker 2015: 65).

An early version of "Reading Literacy Narratives" and of its framework can be found in a 1991 essay by Eldred, "Narratives of Socialisation: Literacy in the Short Story". In this essay, she argues that "all fiction historicises problems of socialisation" and that one of these problems is "literacy" (1991: 686). For Eldred, "problems of literacy" are one of the defining characteristics of the twentieth-century U.S. short story. To foreground this, she relabels this genre "literacy narrative"/"narrative of socialisation" (the terms are used interchangeably). Eldred puts forward a framework that asks the critic to locate a "collision between competing discourse communities, their language conventions, and their inherent logics" as well as instances of "arrested socialisation", that is, of "characters who having glimpsed a new language and new cultural possibilities find their own speech inadequate and the new speech problematic" (1991: 686). Eldred's framework is intended to be an alternative to more popular framework based on the *Bildung* (maturation, development) of the main character. She argues that "[a]ny short story that can be read as a story of

psychological development can be reread as a story of socialisation, as a narrative describing problems of multiple literacies of a given time and place" (Eldred 1991: 697).

The ideas of "collision between competing discourse communities" and of "problems of multiple literacies of a given time and place" are informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "speech genres" and by a discipline called "New Literacy Studies" (also known as "*the* New Literacy Studies"). "Speech genres" denote individual and collective ways of organising and using language (Bakhtin 1952-53/1994: 81; Eldred 1991: 695; Eldred 2018: private correspondence). Bakhtin argues that there is a "boundless" variety of speech genres (Bakhtin 1952-53/1994: 81) and that we all learn to master some rather than others. In the course of our lives, however, we may be required to negotiate new repertoires, either by sanction or by choice (Bakhtin 1952-53/1994: 83-84). Hence, the idea of "collisions".

New Literacy Studies (henceforth NLS) is a field that started to develop at the end of the 1970s via the social sciences (e.g. social history, education, anthropology, cognitive psychology) as a response to "great divide" theories (Finnegan 1973: 112). Great divide theories endorse the "literacy myth", that is, the idea that literacy is the precondition for social and economic progress, morality and cognitive development (Graff 1979). Moreover, they classify cultures as either "literate" (societies with a writing system) or "oral/illiterate" (societies without a writing system), positing incommensurable differences between them. A well-known example of great divide theory is *Orality and Literacy* by Walter Ong (1982/2012). Ong argues that the cognition of literate people is radically different from that of people from oral societies, and that learning the alphabet (as opposed to, say, Chinese pictographs) *always* fosters enhanced cognitive abilities and cultural progress (1982/2012: 14-15, 89).[16] For NLS, literacy is much more than a set of cognitive skills and cannot be isolated from orality and other semiotic modes. Literacy is a "social practice" (Street 1984; Street 1993; Street 2012): a culturally-embedded activity which is plural and diverse because it coexists with other semiotic modes and is shaped by variables such as

[16] Great divide theories developed in the U.S., U.K., and Canada from the 1960s onwards. The universities of Harvard, Toronto and Cambridge were the main institutions that contributed to their dissemination. Ong's characterisation of the oral and literate minds draws on the essay "The Consequences of Literacy" (1963/1968: 31-34) by Jack Goody and Ian Watt. The idea that alphabetic literacy is superior to other kinds of literacy comes from British classicist Eric Havelock (1963/1977).

time, place, gender, race, class. NLS allow for as many literac*ies*, or literacy practices, as there are combinations of modes and culture's variables.

Many NLS scholars approach literacy using an "ideological model". Coined by anthropologist Brian Street (1984: 95-129; 1993: 7-10), this term refers to a theoretical framework for *ethnographic* studies of literacy, that is, for studies that examine how literacy is deployed in real life.[17] Using an ideological model entails acknowledging that literacy is a social practice complicit in the process of maintaining domination. The ideological model is based on the premise that literacy's plurality does not lead to a celebration of diversity and difference but to power structures, hierarchies, and deficit constructions of literacy. Certain literacy practices tend to be seen as more legitimate and desirable than others. For instance, a literacy practice founded on the use of standard, grammatically correct language and print (which, following James Paul Gee [1990/2008], I have called "essay-text literacy") generally has more linguistic capital than literacy practices which make minimal use of print and which rely on oral communication via regional dialects. Those who rely on literacy practices which have little capital are likely labelled as "illiterate", "semi-literate", "primitive", "uncivilised". NLS challenges deficit constructions of literacy by showing that each literacy plays a precise identitarian and epistemological role for the people who practise it. Street's ideological model was intended to be a challenge to what he called the "autonomous model" of literacy (1984: 95-129; 1993: 7-10), that is, theoretical frameworks that describe literacy merely as a set of cognitive skills and/or as a technology which has transformative powers regardless of the context in which it is used.

In "Reading Literacy Narratives", Eldred and Mortensen retain Bakhtin's idea of speech genres and NLS' ideological model.[18] They argue that when engaging literacy

[17] Although it was developed by an ethnographer and anthropologist (Street) with ethnography and anthropology in mind, the ideological model has been adopted by educators (Janks 2010: 118; Grenfell and others 2013: 2-3), social historians (Graff 2013: 112-113), sociolinguists (Gee 1990/2008: 80-81), film studies scholars (William and Zenger 2007: 6, 11-12) and literary scholars, e.g. Eldred and Mortensen.

[18] In their essay, Eldred and Mortensen only use the term "literacy studies" (without "new") (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 512-513). The phrase "New Literacy Studies" became current a few years after the publication of their essay. It was coined by sociolinguist James Paul Gee in the first edition of his book *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* published in 1990. It began to be widely used after that, thanks to the popularity of Gee's book (now into its fifth edition) and to anthropologist Brian Street, who in 1993, started to use "New Literacy Studies" in his works. In "A New Critical Framework for Azorean-American

narratives, "we focus on a battle over language that is foregrounded in the text" (1992: 529) and that "we study how the text constructs a character's ongoing, social process of language acquisition" (1992: 521). However, they enlarge "Narratives of Socialisation" by extending the purview of the literacy narrative to genres other than the short story. Furthermore, like O'Sullivan, they concede that the theme of language learning and literacy can be either central or of secondary importance. They argue that literacy narratives can be "strands of narrative possibility" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 512) contained in texts that belong to well-known generic labels. They, in other words, suggest that the literacy narrative can be a subgenre within a genre, a literary mode. The literacy narrative is likely to feature as a subgenre/literary mode in "narratives of socialisation", "coming-of-age stories" (e.g. the *Bildungsroman*) and in "literature of the contact zone", i.e. "fiction authored in colonial contexts or out of colonial histories" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 513).

At the same time, they posit the existence of texts specifically about language learning and literacy:

> [L]iteracy narratives are those stories, like Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy. […]. Literacy narratives include explicit images of schooling and teaching; they include texts that both challenge and affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy. (1992: 513)

As Eldred and Mortensen note, this definition implies that it is possible to think of the literacy narrative as a self-standing genre (1992: 530).

Eldred and Mortensen provide three tools for interpreting literacy narratives: these are the "operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy" (1992: 516), the "regionalising of literacy" (1992: 523-529) and the "competing logics of the literacy narrative" (1992: 529). The "operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy" refers to the metaphors and tropes used for the characterisation of literacy teachers. The "regionalising

Stories", Eldred explicitly cites "New Literacy Studies" as an influence on "Reading Literacy Narratives" (Eldred 2010: n.p.).

of literacy" entails assessing if space (countries, regions, streets) and individual characterises (class, gender, clothing) are represented in a way that conveys a great divide between literacy and orality and between literacy and illiteracy. Put differently, is literacy/illiteracy assigned exclusively to certain people and certain geographical spaces? Eldred and Mortensen, in line with NLS, deem the regionalising of literacy to be a flawed way of representing literacy. Literacy always exists alongside orality and other semiotic modes. Furthermore, since literacy is plural and multiple, the boundaries between literacy and illiteracy can be difficult to pin down (1992: 526-527). The "competing logics of the literacy narrative" (1992: 529) refers to the various genres under which the text can be subsumed. For Eldred and Mortensen, "literacy narratives are rarely isolated, uncomplicated, unaffected by other modes or logics" (1992: 530). Literacy narratives always dovetail with other genres. Eldred and Mortensen trace the notion of the competing logics to poststructuralist studies of narrative that emphasise the hybridity of literary texts: "[c]ritics […] have searched for ways in which the text […] combines forms to create heteroglossia – the combination of characters, perspectives, logics and genres" (1992: 530). "Heteroglossia" is a word taken from Bakhtin and his *Dialogic Imagination* (1935/1994), where it is used to refer to the coexistence of different speech genres within the novel (1935/1994: 114-120). Eldred and Mortensen modify its original meaning and use it to denote the coexistence of different genres and their characteristics within a single text.

The notion of the competing logics is consonant with Eldred and Mortensen's definition of literacy narrative. If a literacy narrative is a "strand of narrative possibility", the text which contains the strand will already belong to a separate and already well-known genre. The same holds if the entirety of a text can be classified as a literacy narrative since the text will already have been received under different classifications. Understanding which genres are at play is important because questions of genre "direct" and "shape" criticism (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 530). Genres are ready-made templates which provide parameters for interpretation. As a result, they can account for the reasons why a text has been interpreted in a certain way. This also implies that, when a new generic definition appear, they produce new templates that can help chart new interpretations.

Eldred and Mortensen apply the three tools to George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. *Pygmalion* tells the story of Eliza, a London flower girl who, thanks to elocution lessons by a professor of phonetics (Henry Higgins) manages to rid herself of her Cockney accent and to access the middle/upper class. At the time of Eldred and Mortensen's writing, *Pygmalion* tended to be read as a romance and a rags-to-riches story. For instance, according to a then-recent collection of essays edited by Harold Bloom, Eliza's education is totally desirable (1992: 535). Eliza "makes a journey from 'darkness to light'" which introduces her "the relative sophistication and freedom of the upper classes" (Berst in Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 535).

Eldred and Mortensen challenge these readings. They argue that the play investigates the relation between literacy, gender and class (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 513). For Eliza, middle-class status and learning to speak like a lady do not lead to "the light", but to a lack of independence (1992: 518). Henry, they observe, causes Eliza to lose her occupation and to be transformed into "a displaced prostitute, not a literate lady" (1992: 535). By reading *Pygmalion* as a literacy narrative, Eldred and Mortensen interpret the play as a text that runs against the grain of the literacy myth and that highlights social issues such as the impact of gender and class on literacy acquisition: If you are a woman, literacy may lead to upward social mobility, but it does not necessarily lead to empowerment. *Pygmalion*, in other words, is a play about how literacy cannot easily neutralise the depressing effects of female disenfranchisement.

The three tools prove to be productive for the play's reception. They afford new insights and they permit the critic to pinpoint where the text runs against the grain of widely accepted conceptualisations of literacy. Nevertheless, scholars who have taken up the concept of the literacy narrative tend not to use them. Eldred herself, in a 2010 conference paper which attempts to revisit "Reading Literacy Narratives" to "accommodate transnational communities and scholarship" (Eldred 2010; Eldred 2018: private correspondence), does not mention them. Yet, since, by applying them, Eldred and Mortensen provide new insights into Shaw's play, I envisage the literacy narrative approach to be a form of literary criticism that might systematically make use of them and, in the following three chapters, I will apply them to the texts I have selected.

Although "Reading Literacy Narratives" is an important contribution to research on representations of language acquisition and literacy, there is a sense of confusion running

through the essay. The word “literacy” – which is supposed to denote language-as-writing and the concomitant ability to read and write – is often used by Eldred and Mortensen as a substitute for language and language learning. To complicate matters further, “literacy” and “orality” are often run together. For instance, Henry Higgins is described as a literacy teacher although he gives Eliza elocution (*speech*) lessons (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 516). When Eliza’s father, a dustman of Welsh origin, appears on stage, Henry makes disparaging remarks about the “tone” of his speech: "‘Observe the rhythm of his native woodnotes wild. 'I'm willing to tell you; I'm wanting to tell you; I'm waiting to tell you.' Sentimental rhetoric! That’s the Welsh strain in him. It also accounts for his mendacity and dishonesty’ (55)” (Shaw in Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 523). Henry’s remarks are about Eliza’s father’s speech, but Eldred and Mortensen refer to them as “literacy” (1992: 523). The conflation of literacy and speech enlarges the meaning of “literacy” well beyond what literacy is normally taken to mean and well beyond the meaning it has in this thesis.

These conflations are characteristic of much NLS scholarship and we can also find them in the seminal *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (1983) by Shirley Brice Heath. *Ways with Words* is an ethnographic study of the literacy practices of three South Carolina communities that differ in socioeconomic ascription and ethnicity. Although literacy is central, it does not feature in the title; “language” does instead. Furthermore, to identify the communities’ literacy practices, Heath uses a very broad definition of literacy, namely, the “literacy event”. The notion of the “literacy event” was formulated in Heath’s earlier essay “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions” (1982/2001) and is applied throughout *Ways with Words* (1983: 200, 386). A “literacy event” refers to “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (1982/2001: 445). In a literacy event, people are not required to read, or write, anything. What is more, speech (orality) is also included in its purview. In *Ways with Words*, an *oral* discussion about “a letter about a daycare program” that only one person has read is a literacy event and, therefore, literacy (Heath 1983: 196). The literacy event enlarges the meaning of literacy to such an extent that it blurs the distinctions between literacy and orality and, consequently, between literacy and illiteracy.

There is a rationale underpinning this enlargement. As Collins and Blot have argued, Heath “wanted to understand literacy acquisition in those communities as part of *general*

language acquisition" (2009: 39, my italics). For Heath, language, literacy and language acquisition are part of the same paradigm and cannot be separated. This idea is also one of the foundations of NLS. For NLS scholars, in literate societies, language, literacy and orality exist along a continuum and their interactions determine people's language, their "ways with words". Furthermore, since literacy is never far from orality, illiteracy can become a redundant concept:

> [S]ome of the pluralistic set of skills and understanding that we describe as literacy are part of our common socio-historical heritage. Although the actual stylistic form of this heritage varies according to the linguistic history of the social community, no part of any modern society can realistically be called non-literate. (Cook-Gumperz 2006: 49)

Although the conflation of language, literacy and orality is justifiable in the light of NLS, it creates contradictions since semiotic modes that are *not* literacy in the strict sense (i.e. orality, speech) are subsumed under this very term. Literacy may be an important mode but it is not the only one. This is an idea that is often stressed by NLS. Paradoxically, the tendency to subsume different semiotic modes under literacy runs the risk of cancelling out the very differences that NLS wants to stress. These differences are important because they are part of what engenders literacy practices, and, by extension, what makes literacy a plural concept. There are many types of literacies because there are many different "ways with words" but also because literacy is cut across by other modes of communication.

Over the past ten years, some NLS scholars have started to employ a more precise vocabulary. This change has been brought about by NLS's collaboration with the field of multimodality. Multimodality is a branch of social semiotics. Social semiotics investigates human communication and representation and posits that these materialise through semiotic modes (also known as semiotic systems). Semiotic modes are resources for meaning-making and representation consisting of "signs". Following Ferdinand de Saussure, social semioticians define "sign" as a fusion of form (signifier) and meaning (signified) (Saussure 1916/1974). The signs that make up semiotic systems may be verbal (linguistic) or non-verbal (non-linguistic). Widely used and well-known semiotic systems are language,

language-as-writing, speech, colour, image, clothes, music, sound, and bodily gestures (body language). Semiotic modes and their signs can be used as tools for communication and representation because they are underpinned by interpretive conventions which are shared by the members of a social group. Shared conventions make signs decodable and meaningful.

Multimodality shares social semiotics' theoretical grounds but starts from the premise that meaning and sign-making are "multimodal", that is, they involve more than one semiotic mode. Multimodality is associated with the works of Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996; 2001). Kress and Van Leeuwen study multimodality because there is a tendency, amongst Western academics and non-academics, to conceptualise communication as being exclusively language-based and, therefore, "monomodal". Their goal is to redress the emphasis on language (whether in the guise of writing or speech) as the most important mode of representation and communication. Their studies are characterised by a sense of urgency. Although they stress that that multimodality has always been a feature of human communication, they argue that technological changes are facilitating the inclusion of various semiotic modes in any one single artefact/representation. These changes call for a theory that can account for the role of the linguistic and the non-linguistic.

Key analytics of multimodal analysis theory include the concepts of "affordance" and "salience". "Affordance" refers to "what can be 'said' and 'done'" with a semiotic mode (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 213). Each mode has its own potential for meaning-making that cannot be replicated entirely by other modes. For instance, Kress argues that, to make sense of a written text, there is "'a reading path' set by the order of the words which I must follow" (Kress 2003: 4). Writing, therefore, rests on the affordance of "temporal sequence" (sequentiality/time) (Kress 2003:3). Image has its own "reading paths" but these are much more open. Image rests on the "the logic of space and spatiality" and of "salience": "[M]aking an element central and other elements marginal will encourage the reader to move from the centre to the margin. Making some elements salient through […] size, colour, shape […] and other less salient again encourages a reading path" (2003: 4). Although Kress, here, associates salience with image, it is an affordance of writing and other modes as well. Repetitions of a verbal sign, of an interpunct, the use of a typeface that stands out from the text, can confer salience on aspects of writing (Kress 1997: 134; Kress 2003; Van Leeuwen

2006: 144; Jewitt and Kress 2008: 11). “Salience” (like “affordance”) is an analytic that can be transferred across modes.

Some of the theories and tools developed by multimodality have been harnessed by NLS ethnographers and researchers. The collections of essays *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies: Instances of Practices* (Phal and Rowsell 2006) and *The Routledge Book of Multimodal Analysis* (Jewitt 2009) are attempts to dovetail NLS with multimodality by highlighting the coexistence of various semiotic modes within literacy practices and the extent to which multimodality makes literacy plural. Gunther Kress (1997; 2003) has published studies that address the relation between literacy and multimodality, without, however, making explicit reference to NLS. By subdividing human communication into many semiotic modes, of which language and language-as-writing (literacy) are but two possible examples, these works offer NLS a vocabulary with which to explain what differentiates a literacy practice, or a literacy event, from another.

The insights afforded by the alliance between NLS and multimodality can be productive for the framework proposed by Eldred and Mortensen. Firstly, they can help avoid confusing conflations of meaning. Secondly, since they refract language into different semiotic modes, they enable us to read literacy narratives not just as “a battle over language” but also as “a battle over literacy practices” and “a battle over semiotic modes”. Battles over semiotic modes and literacy practices enlarge the range of textual elements at play in a text, which can lead to more nuanced interpretations. Furthermore, analytics such as “affordance” and “salience” can be applied to the materiality of the literary texts itself and to representations of literary texts contained in the literacy narrative being studied. Because of these advantages, I envisage the literacy narrative approach as a form of literary criticism that makes systematic use of the insights afforded by the dialogue between NLS and multimodality.

A criticism that can be levelled at a framework that divides communication into semiotic modes is that it gives a contrived representation of the way in which these interact. Orality, literacy and other modes exist along a continuum and cannot be neatly separated. However, there are differences in their interactions which depend on historical, cultural factors and individual dispositions. The literacy narrative approach seeks to convey these differences knowing that representations of interactions between modes will always be contrived precisely because they are representations. Another criticism is that multimodal

analysis is “impressionistic” (Jewitt 2009: 26; Nørgaard 2009: 143). How can we be sure that a glance, a sound, mean this and not that? Carey Jewitt has argued that methods already exist: “The principles for establishing the ‘security’ of a meaning or a category are the same for multimodality as for linguistics (or philosophy or fine art). It is resolved by linking the meanings people make (whatever the mode) to context and social function” (2009: 26). Contextualization and historicisation are crucial for ensuring that interpretation remains credible and productive. Another strategy that can be used to ensure the “security” of meaning is “interest” (Kress 1997: 88-91). “Interest” is related to contextualization and history since it refers to the reasons that led the sign-maker/writer to create a particular sign/text. “Interest” (the reasons behind sign-making, the intention) refers to the interaction between spontaneous expression and social constraints. In other words, it is the interaction between the sign-maker’s own intention, his/her own subjective world-view, and the ready-made world-views that are available to the sign-maker (e.g. traditions, ideology, conventions, culture).

To sum up: the literacy narrative approach which I propose here can be defined as a theoretical framework that draws on NLS and Eldred and Mortensen’s “Reading Literacy Narratives”. This approach considers literacy as an inextricable aspect of language and language learning. To refer to representations of language acquisition, it uses the term “literacy narrative”. The literacy narrative approach acknowledges that representations of language acquisition and literacy can be either central or ancillary to the main narrative. To account for this, the term “literacy narrative” serves both to denote a genre and a subgenre. Literacy narratives are interpreted through the tools provided by Eldred and Mortensen (operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy, the regionalising of literacy, the competing logics of the literacy narrative) and insights from multimodality (the coexistence of different semiotic modes, affordance, salience, interest).

Conclusion

This chapter has synthesised research on the interpretation of representations of language acquisition and literacy and has put forward a model consisting of three approaches: the language learner approach, the translation approach and the literacy narrative approach. All the frameworks posit texts as powerful epistemological tools that can shed light on a variety

of language-related phenomena. I have also argued that the language learner approach concentrates on issues of affect and that the translation approach and the literacy narrative approach are more attuned to the extra-textual and ideological dimension of language acquisition than this latter. However, the literacy narrative approach is the most useful since it is the only one that systematically considers the intrinsic link between language learning and literacy. Furthermore, while the translation approach focusses primarily on migrant learners and, consequently, on instances of second language acquisition, the literacy narrative approach considers a wider typology, e.g. learning to *read* a second language, learning a sociolect similar to your first language. The literacy narrative approach thus provides more tools with which to engage texts, which can lead not only to more nuanced interpretations but also to a more accurate overview of the theme of language acquisition and literacy in literature.

Some of the advantages of the literacy narrative approach become apparent if we consider *Nicholas Nickleby* and Mr Squeers's English lesson mentioned at the outset. Mr Squeers is the headmaster of a boys' boarding school in West Yorkshire where Nicholas has just been employed as teacher. The school is attended by poor orphans and illegitimate children who Mr Squeers and his wife underfeed and treat as slaves. Mr Squeers only teaches his pupils to spell words that denote menial tasks that are useful to him, a pedagogy that he calls "the practical mode of teaching": "C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. […]. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes on and does it" (1838/2003: 100).

This scene does not describe the pupils' affect, how language and literacy acquisition make them feel. We can, of course, infer from Dickens's descriptions of their physical appearance that they are worsening their distress ("Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenance of old men, deformities with irons up their limbs" [1838/2003: 97]), but we do not have access to their subjective experiences.[19] Moreover, the pupils cannot be classified as migrants negotiating the language of the host

[19] As noted in Section 1.1, representations of affect are not constant across time and space (Pavlenko 2001a: 216), but, rather, a defining characteristic of American autobiographies written in the second half of the twentieth century (Pavlenko 2001a: 216).

country. As a result, the language learner approach and the translation approach are unlikely to provide a way into the text.

Conversely, by applying the literacy narrative approach, I can chart an interpretive path. This is a scene which foregrounds the inextricable link between language acquisition, literacy and ideology. Language education is controlled by schools, the middle class (Mr Squeers and Nicholas Nickleby) and can be instrumental in keeping the lower classes subordinate. I could argue that Dickens highlights what Harvey Graff has called the "moral basis of literacy", that is, the conflation of literacy acquisition with the inculcation of traits such as obedience, deference and punctuality in order to preserve the social order (Graff 1979: 24-25; Gee 1987: 204-205). This is also a scene that undermines Scribner's metaphor of the state of grace (1984: 13-15) and the literacy myth, the widely held assumption that literacy automatically leads to empowerment, progress, ethical behaviour and upward social mobility (Graff 1979: 2-6) From here, I can move onto a comparison with the other literacy narratives present in the novel, or with other nineteenth-century texts. I can also discuss whether this literacy narrative challenges or reinforces the way in which Dickens represents other aspects of identity formation.

The literacy narrative also offers a productive template for addressing the issue of genre. As explained in Section 1.1, for Kaplan, there exists a genre called "the language memoir". O'Sullivan argues that it is misleading to think in this way because the texts under consideration are likely to have been received (and, probably, also conceived by the author) as a different genre. Moreover, the notion of genre may cause critics to bypass incidental representations of language learning. Eldred and Mortensen mediate this issue by coining a term (the literacy narrative) which denotes both a subgenre and a genre, and by introducing the tool of the competing logics. The competing logics draws on postmodern arguments of generic hybridity and allows the critic to consider all the genres under which the text can be, and has been, subsumed. This prevents any single genre from taking over and allows the critic to explore representations of language acquisition and literacy regardless of their status in the text.

Notwithstanding efforts to distinguish between genre and subgenre, in the U.S., Eldred and Mortensen's ideas have evolved so that the literacy narrative is now considered a fully-fledged genre practised by both professional and non-professional writers. In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I will apply the literacy narrative approach to texts in

which representations of language acquisition and literacy are either salient or ancillary to the main narrative. To account for these differences, I will distinguish between genre and subgenre. However, regardless of the status of the literacy narrative, the result is the same: analysing representations of language acquisition and literacy by means of the literacy narrative approach can produce unexpected interpretations and can help us reconsider the significance of literacy and language learning in literary texts.

CHAPTER 2: INTERSEMIOTIC CONFLICT IN RICHARD RODRIGUEZ'S *HUNGER OF MEMORY*

[T]o learn to speak, it is not enough to hear the sounds of the voices around us; one also needs to grasp the articulation of these sounds; two very different operations […].Therefore, we could say that language is a kind of music to which certain ears, however perfectly formed, can be indifferent. Jean Itard (1801/2012: 41, my translation)

A literate person, asked to think of the word "nevertheless" will normally (and I strongly suspect always) have some image, at least vague, of the spelt-out word and be quite unable to ever think of the word "nevertheless" for, let us say, 60 seconds without adverting to any letters but only to the sound. Walter Ong (1982/2012: 12)

Language (understood as a system of words) is usually thought of as a compound of discrete national and natural languages. Nevertheless, it can also be viewed as a semiotic mode which can be refracted into further modes. The epigraph by Jean Itard is both a reflection on the reasons why his pupil, Victor of Aveyron, discussed in the Introduction, does not respond to speech and a reflection on the incidence of sound in language. When speaking, we emit bodily sounds received by the physiology of hearing. These sounds, in turn, can be perceived as a "kind of music". Music is itself a semiotic mode which is normally associated with singing, music notation and musical instruments, rather than speech alone. However, through the effects of prosody (pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation, accent), spoken words take on musical qualities which, as Itard notes, convey meaning and set speech apart from other sounds. The statement by Ong, which applies primarily to language in literate societies, highlights the incidence of the semiotic modes of writing and, concomitantly, of image. Writing dovetails with image because it consists of graphic signs which are received by the physiology of sight through reading.[1]

The literacy narrative approach, as outlined in the previous chapter, is a form of criticism that works with a conceptualisation of language which is closer to one that can be

[1] The field of New Literacy Studies has amply demonstrated that Ong's statements are often sweeping and not backed by empirical evidence (e.g. Scribner and Cole 1981): How can we be sure that *all* literate persons cannot think of a word for 60 seconds without also thinking of its written form? Nevertheless, here, Ong's ideas are useful because they foreground some of the semiotic modes that refract language, namely, writing and image.

extrapolated from Itard and Ong. National and natural languages are considered but they are not treated as monolithic entities. Each national/natural language has its own sounds, its own "music" and its own graphic representation. Languages are refracted into modes in order to locate "battles over semiotic modes and literacy practices" in texts that can be classified as "literacy narratives". The term "literacy narrative" (Eldred and Mortensen: 1992) denotes both a genre and a subgenre. It denotes a genre when representations of language acquisition and literacy are foregrounded above everything else and can be said to coincide with the text itself. It denotes a subgenre when representations of language acquisition and literacy form a pattern which plays a secondary role within the overall economy of a text. Although it can be thought of as a self-standing genre, Eldred and Mortensen argue that the literacy narrative is always hybrid. A literacy narrative will always have "competing logics" running through it. The "competing logics" are all the genres which are applicable to the text being studied. Each "competing logic", they argue, informs interpretation and, consequently, is instrumental in pinpointing the "battles" represented in the literacy narrative. Understanding these battles has added benefits: it can help us understand the dynamics of language acquisition and literacy in real life, their relation to ideology, and add new layers of meaning to the text's reception.

In this chapter, I apply the literacy narrative approach to *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982/2004), a collection of six autobiographical essays by Mexican-American writer Richard Rodriguez. In *Hunger*, each essay constitutes a chapter, is narrated in the first person and discusses aspects of Rodriguez's life and identity formation. Representations of language acquisition, literacy and schooling are so central that the whole book can be classified as a literacy narrative, but Rodriguez also addresses race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, the education system and family relations. *Hunger* has been a commercial success. The book is still in print, it is widely anthologised in the U.S. where it has become a staple of composition studies and an archetypal example of the genre of the literacy narrative (Saldívar 1985: 33; Paredes 1992: 280; Pérez Firmat 1996: 255; Dunbar-Odom 2006: 38). The book's early reception was extremely favourable too. In the prestigious *New York Times Book Review*, *Hunger* was described as an "exquisite" tale a about the "universal labor of growing up" (Zweig 1982: 1). However, *Hunger* and its author soon found themselves at the centre of a controversy due to the way Rodriguez describes his language learning experiences.

Rodriguez was born in Sacramento (California) in 1944 into a family of Spanish-speaking "Chicanos" (U.S.-born, U.S. citizens of Mexican descent living in the U.S.). His parents brought him and his three younger siblings up speaking only Spanish. When Rodriguez started primary school, aged six, he knew only "some fifty stray English words" (Rodriguez 1982/2004: 9). To facilitate his integration in the classroom, his parents – following the advice of his teachers – decided to replace Spanish with English as their family language.[2] In *Hunger,* Rodriguez eloquently captures the affective trauma caused by this change. At the same time, he recursively stresses the "alienation" he felt as a Spanish speaker (1982/2004: 1), the "social and political advantages" of proficiency in English and of assimilation in the U.S. mainstream (1982/2004: 27, 145-147). Moreover, he declares himself against "bilingual education" (1982/2004: 10, 17) – the use of both English and a minority language as medium of instruction –[3] and "affirmative action" (1982/2004: 153-185), a set of governmental policies aimed at redressing the underrepresentation of minorities (mainly ethnic minorities and women, but also war veterans and people with disabilities) in employment, education and government contracting (Beeman and others 2000: 101; Anderson 2010: 135; Meshelski 2016: 427).

Hunger is a literacy narrative that sanctions the irrelevance of U.S. cultural and linguistic minorities by using Rodriguez's own experiences with Spanish and Chicano culture. As a result, it has drawn fire from Chicano and left-wing intellectuals. In 1984, Chicano writer Tomas Rivera argued that Rodriguez had "a colonized mind" (1984: 9); a year later, Chicano critic Ramón Saldívar accused Rodriguez of "political service to the Right" (1985: 27). Writing in 2004, postcolonial critic and composition studies scholar Morris Young, echoing Rivera and Saldívar, charged Rodriguez with "acquiescence to the hegemony of American culture" (2004: 63). Composition studies scholars Mary Soliday (1994: 511), Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1996: 255) and Donna Dunbar-Odom (2006: 38) note how their students often meet *Hunger* with resistance since they disapprove of its pro-assimilation argument. The consensus across a wide range of students and scholars, therefore, is that

[2]This change will cause Rodriguez to stop speaking Spanish altogether during his childhood and early adolescence. Rodriguez will relearn it as a foreign language at secondary school (Rodriguez 1982/2004: 3, 28).
[3] In their article on bilingual education in the U.S., Baker and others define it in a different way, namely, as education programs where learners receive instruction in English and in a "language other than English" (2016: 822) They, in other words, do not stress the power differential of the languages involved in *some* bilingual education programmes. I have introduced the term "minority" to highlight this aspect and because, as we shall see, it is the aspect that Rodriguez finds problematic.

Hunger is a conservative book written by a conservative writer who overtly privileges a single dominant culture and language over linguistic and cultural diversity.

In this chapter, I argue that, although this interpretation is inescapable, it is the result of a view of language founded on national/natural languages (Spanish and English, in this case) and their corresponding ethnicities (Mexican-American and White American). By using the literacy narrative approach, it possible to highlight a conflict between language-as-sound and language-as-writing. Language-as-sound and language-as-writing are grafted onto Spanish and English respectively, but they also transcend the boundaries of these languages to delineate literacy practices which are transferrable from one language to another. Language-as-sound is part of a literacy practice associated with the working class and that makes minimal use of reading and writing, relying, instead, on the "music" of language for communication. Language-as-writing is part of a literacy practice associated with the middle class and coincides with "essay-text literacy" – a practice based on grammatically correct standard language that makes extensive use of print and of reading/writing extended pieces of prose. From the vantage point of semiotic modes and literacy practices, *Hunger* can be reframed as a lucid (rather than reactionary) analysis of the workings of ideology in language acquisition and of the reasons why certain language learners find it more difficult to learn in the classroom than others.

To refer to interpretations that use the lens of Spanish and English, I will use the shorthand "interlingual". To refer to the interpretation based on the literacy narrative approach, I will use "intersemiotic". "Interlingual" and "intersemiotic" come from the Latin prefix *inter* (between, among) and mean "between languages" and "between semiotic modes" respectively. Both "interlingual" and "intersemiotic" are normally found in translation studies scholarship. They were introduced by the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson in his 1959 essay "On Aspects of Linguistic Translation" to illustrate the types of translation that can be carried out. Jakobson used "interlingual translation" to describe a text in one natural/national language which is rendered with a different language (Jakobson 1959/2002: 145). Interlingual translation is the most widely studied type of translation (Munday 2012: 9) and the type of translation that ordinary people think of when they use the word "translation" *tout court*. Jakobson used "intersemiotic translation" to describe a text in one national/natural language rendered with a non-verbal semiotic mode, e.g. music or image (Jakobson 1959/2002: 145). "Interlingual" and "intersemiotic" are convenient

labels because they point to a conceptualisation of language as a compound of national/natural languages and a conceptualisation of language as a compound of semiotic modes respectively.

This chapter is divided into five sections. In Section 1, "Positioning Rodriguez as a Chicano", I discuss the word "Chicano". "Chicano" is a polysemic identity marker whose relation to Rodriguez is complex. Rodriguez does not self-identify as a Chicano; however, "Chicano" often appears in the reception of *Hunger* (I myself have used it to introduce the author). Therefore, in this section, I clarify how it applies to Rodriguez. Further, surveying the various meanings of "Chicano" contextualises *Hunger* against the background of the so-called "Chicano movement" of the 1960s. Understanding the influence of this movement suggests that the controversy stirred up by this book when it was first published was contingent, stemming from the cultural climate produced by this movement; this, in turn, lends support to the thesis that the book's conservatism has been overstated.

In Section 2, "Rodriguez's controversial view of the world: the public versus the private", I discuss how Rodriguez represents the world around him and the role that English and Spanish play within it. This is a topic that often features in the reception of *Hunger* since it lends support to the charge of conservatism. I illustrate it here because, from the perspective of the literacy narrative approach, it becomes a template for understanding the intersemiotic conflict present in the text.

In Section 3, "The competing logics of *Hunger of Memory*", I apply one of the three tools that Eldred and Mortensen formulate in "Reading Literacy Narratives", namely, the "competing logics of the literacy narrative". I argue that, from the outset, Rodriguez self-consciously subsumes *Hunger* under different generic labels to suggest that the text can be interpreted in different ways. I note how Rodriguez dissociates *Hunger* from "ethnic literature" and that he points to the literacy narrative (although he did not use this term) and autobiography as the most useful generic lenses for interpretation.

In Section 4, "Intersemiotic conflict in *Hunger* of *Memory*", I illustrate the semiotic modes used by Rodriguez to make meaning and communicate during his preschool years and those used after he became integrated in the classroom. I argue that, in his narrative, Rodriguez suggests that, before he started school, he made use of the "oral mode", a literacy practice based on the sound and "music" of words and that, afterwards, he became familiar with essay-text literacy. I also argue that these practices can be traced to class

divides and that the alienation that Rodriguez initially encountered in the English-speaking classroom was not due solely to Spanish but to a lack of awareness of the uses of print and the written word in the education setting.

In Section 5, "*Hunger of Memory* reworded", I discuss the currency of the intersemiotic conflict that Rodriguez presents in *Hunger* by drawing parallels with social theory and NLS theory. I argue that *Hunger* has much in common with Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1982/1991) and that Rodriguez's critique of affirmative action shares a conceptual ground with *Literacy and Power* (2010), a pedagogical guide for language teachers working in multilingual and multiethnic classrooms written by literacy scholar and educator Hilary Janks.

Overall, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the advantages of adopting an intersemiotic view of language alongside an interlingual one. When applied to a text like *Hunger*, which has mainly been read through a combined interlingual and ethnic lens, it can highlight the presence of representations of different semiotic modes and literacy practices grafted onto national languages. This can alter our perception of the controversy that has accompanied both the book and its author and suggest that *Hunger* is not *just* a reactionary book but also a book that offers an insightful rendition of ideology in language acquisition and literacy.

Such a reading is congruent with Rodriguez's later works. After *Hunger*, Rodriguez published another two collections of autobiographical essays: *Days of Obligation: An Argument with my Mexican Father* (1992) and *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). These works are often read as a radical break with *Hunger* since Rodriguez argues for the inevitability of ethnic and cultural hybridity. Chicano intellectual José David Saldívar maintains that *Days of Obligation* is "everything that *Hunger of Memory* is not" and speaks of a "sea change in Rodriguez's worldview" (1997: 146), while Juan de Castro, discussing one of the essays that would later appear in *Brown*, defines the author as "a theorist of the borderland" because he goes "beyond the binary oppositions that characterised *Hunger of Memory*" (2001: 119). By reconfiguring Rodriguez's conservatism, the literacy narrative approach suggests that there is a degree of continuity and coherence between *Hunger*, *Days of Obligation* and *Brown*.

2.1 Positioning Rodriguez as a Chicano

The word "Chicano" often features in the reception of *Hunger* where it serves various functions. It is used to refer simultaneously to the writer's ethnicity (Mexican-American) and the socioeconomic ascription of his family (working class) and/or to the literary tradition into which *Hunger* and its author should be inserted. Chicano writer Tomas Rivera speaks of "a body of work of Chicano literature" that celebrates Chicano language and culture (1984: 11-12) and argues that *Hunger* is its antithesis. Ramón Saldívar, a theoretician of Chicano literature, compares *Hunger* to an autobiography by Mexican-American writer Ernesto Galarza – *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy's Acculturation* (1971) – and argues that this latter is more representative of Chicano literature than *Hunger* (1985: 25, 33). In *Barrio Boy*, "we are not offered a tale of assimilation", but the tale of a self who exists in an organic human collective […] he calls *la raza* [Chicano people]" and who forges "a span between his original Mexican and his acquired American enculturation" (1985: 32). On the one hand, these remarks suggest that the label "Chicano" is unsuitable for describing Rodriguez. On the other, they suggest that Rodriguez should be discussed in relation to it.

Rodriguez has always rejected the label "Chicano" as an ethnic qualifier and used, instead, qualifiers that refer to the cultures that, in his opinion, have shaped his development as a human being and as a writer. In a 1999 speech, he uses "Irish" and "Armenian" since his primary school teachers were Irish (Rodriguez 1999: 12' 19") and the author of one of his favourite books is of Armenian origin (Rodriguez 1999: 13' 13"). In *Hunger*, he uses "American" (1)[4]; he also narrates how he turned down a lectureship at Yale in the late 1960s because, due to the implementation of affirmative action in the context of higher education, Yale had to hire someone who could increase its quota of Chicano staff (183-185). Regarding his literary affiliations, in a 2003 interview, Hector Torres asked Rodriguez to define where he fitted in the American literary landscape. Rodriguez replied: "I don't know where I fit, I don't see myself fitting anywhere. I don't think I exist" (2003: 29). Rodriguez's disavowal of the word "Chicano" notwithstanding its presence in the reception of *Hunger* raises the issue of exactly what this qualifier means and of how it applies to Rodriguez and *Hunger*.

[4] Citations from *Hunger* are taken from the 2004 Bantam edition and, from this point forward, they will only be followed by the page number in round parentheses.

Henry Staten defines the word "Chicano/a" as "ambiguous" (1998: 105). On the one hand, it simultaneously denotes an ethnicity and a nationality: "All United States residents of Mexican descent, no matter how wealthy or assimilated" (Staten 1998: 105). On the other hand, it denotes Mexican-Americans belonging to the labouring class (Staten 1998: 115). For this reason, Staten argues that "Chicano" is an "ethclass". "Ethclass" is a term coined by Milton Gordon to refer to identity markers which express socioeconomic ascription as well as ethnicity (in Staten 1998: 115*n*). As an ethclass, "Chicano/a" can, and does, subsume working-class Mexican-Americans but it refers, more specifically, to downtrodden and exploited Mexican labourers.

This connotation stems from Mexico's colonial past at the hand of the U.S.. In 1848, after almost two years' warfare, Mexico ceded half of its national territory to the U.S. (Paredes 1978: 75). Most Mexicans accepted American citizenship but, in the U.S., prejudice against them was rife. They were seen as apathetic and untrustworthy, which established a pattern of discrimination (Paredes 1978: 74). Discrimination was intensified by the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920. Although it established the modern Mexican state, it resulted in random violence and the destruction of the local agriculture (Paredes 1978: 80). This drove many already poor workers out of Mexico into the American Southwest where they found work but no upward social mobility due to prejudice against them. The post-revolutionary migratory flow was followed by a second one in the 1950s in response to a diplomatic agreement between the U.S. and Mexico which licensed Mexican nationals to work for American farmers. In the U.S., Mexican farm workers were referred to as "*braceros*". *Braceros* were often exploited by U.S. landowners (Olivas 1983: 473) and lived segregated in the so-called *barrios* of the South West, i.e. deprived suburbs where only Chicanos lived.

As an ethclass, "Chicano/a" expresses the predicament of the subaltern and marginalised Mexican-Americans who, since the mid-nineteenth century, have been present on American soil. It is, therefore, also an ideological term since it foregrounds issues of power struggles and inequality within the Mexican-American community. In Chapter 5 of *Hunger*, Rodriguez himself comments on the meaning of "Chicano/a" and explains when and how it became an ideological term. He notes that class connotations had always been endemic in it: "*Chicano* […] was a term lower-class Mexican-Americans had long used to name themselves. It was a private word, slangish, even affectionately vulgar, and, when spoken by strangers, insulting" (170, Rodriguez's italics). The connections with Mexico's

colonial past were brought to the fore by "Mexican-American students" who "proclaimed themselves Chicanos" and who "taught many persons in the barrios of southwestern America to imagine themselves in a new context" (170).

The "Mexican-American students" mentioned by Rodriguez were the organisers of the Chicano movement of the 1960s, also known as *chicanismo.* One of its epicentres was University of California-Berkeley (Christopher 2002: 95-96), where Rodriguez studied for his PhD in English Renaissance literature. *Chicanismo* was an organised attempt "to constitute a new group identity tied to the oppressed working class of Mexican descent" (Staten 1998: 105). It was, in other words, a consciousness-raising movement aimed at making lower-class Mexicans aware of their long history of exploitation and of the value of their culture and language.

The "new group identity" that *chicanismo* wished to constitute was known as "*la raza"* (Saldívar 1985: 104). Identifying with *la raza* involved seeing oneself as a "*mestizo/a"*, that is, as a person of hybrid ethnic and cultural ancestry who accepted "a combination of indigenous and European rituals and belief systems, hybrid historical memories, and mixed European and indigenous iconographies" (Marez 2007: 158). In some cases, this was underpinned by a form of essentialist nativism that harked back to Mexico's distant past and which stressed ethnic affiliations with the Indian Aztecs, the Spaniards who had conquered them in the sixteenth century (Staten 1998: 105), and "Aztlán", the Mexicans' ancestral homeland stolen by the Spanish and Anglo colonisers. As Paredes observes, the existence of Aztlán may well be "fraudulent" (1978: 96) but it played an important "symbolic" role since it stood for a common place of origin (1978: 96). However, not all advocates of Chicano/a identity were nativists (Staten 1998: 106). The common denominator of *chicanismo* was, rather, an identification with "a shared history of suffering and struggle as an oppressed, racially mixed group of Mexican descent" (Staten 1998: 106).

Literature played a crucial role in consolidating the sense of cultural heritage and cohesion necessary for the establishment of the Chicano/a identity (Saldívar 1990: 3). It served as a public platform that gave visibility and coherence, through narrative, to the history of the Mexican labouring underclass (Rivera 1984: 12) and to the ideal characteristics of the newly formed Chicano/a identity. Ethnic pride, the desire to nurture one's Mexican roots, the ability to develop a hybrid identity that did not relinquish one's cultural and linguistic heritage were some of defining characteristics that Chicano literature

attempted to foster. These can be found, for instance, in the works of Mario Suárez, one of the earliest representatives of Chicano literature. In 1947, Suárez published a series of short stories about Mexican-Americans living in the *barrio.* Through Suárez, we learn about marginalisation but also about Chicano food, Spanish vocabulary, folklore and "cultural hybrids", that is, Chicanos who pride themselves in their ability to function successfully in two worlds: the *barrio* and the U.S. host culture (Paredes 1978: 91-93).

Chicano works struggled to find an outlet in mainstream American publishing because they were believed to have "too limited an appeal to be profitable" (Paredes 1978: 98). However, Chicano literature managed to establish itself as a genre and a tradition thanks to the creation, in 1967, of Quinto Sol Publications in Berkeley. Its specific mission was to support Chicano writers and to make their works into a recognizable genre that challenged North American literary dominance (Paredes 1978: 95-98; Rivera 1984: 11). Alongside the reaffirmation of cultural ties to contemporary Mexico, Quinto Sol fostered the rediscovery of Aztec heritage (e.g. the ancestral homeland Aztlán) and the development of a specific linguistic style. Since Chicanos normally spoke a dialect of Spanish, Quinto Sol published texts which "aimed to reproduce Chicano speech exactly", and which "used not only conventional Spanish and English but various regional dialects of both languages and a combination of all of these" (Paredes 1978: 96). Although Chicano works thrived thanks to Quinto Sol and other like-minded publishers which were founded later on, they were not as commercially successful as *Hunger* and their distribution did not involve national and mainstream media (Paredes 1978: 95; Rivera 1984: 11; Paredes 1992: 280; Saldívar 1985: 30). *Hunger*'s first edition was published by David R. Godine, a small independent publisher, but the second one, which followed a year later (in 1983), was published by Bantam, a mass market publisher which is part of Random House.

The Chicano movement of the 1960s adds to the ambiguity of the qualifier "Chicano/a" since, alongside ethnicity (Mexican) and class (lower/working class), it implies adherence to a form of nativism and/or self-identification with the Mexican labouring underclass. If a person of Mexican-American descent happens to be a professional writer, the definition becomes even more ambiguous since it implies that the writer in question is not only someone of Mexican descent but also someone who valorises Mexican history and culture and who makes use of nonstandard Spanish and/or English in their works. Rodriguez indeed shares some of the defining characteristics of Chicano activist writers (Mexican

descent and working-class background) but he does not share their cultural and political goals.

In *Hunger*, Rodriguez explains that he never took part in the meetings organised by the Chicano movement at Berkeley (171) and that he did not endorse the movement's nativism: "Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me. I do not search Mexican graveyards for ties to unnameable ancestors" (3). Rodriguez even goes as far as showing contempt for Chicano activists. Chicano students wearing serapes (traditional Mexican shawls) on the Berkeley campus are, for Rodriguez, a "clownish display" (171). Concerning his style and language, Rodriguez writes in a "carefully crafted" Standard English that evokes "the tradition of classic English literature" (Paredes 1992: 293). When he describes his own physical appearance, for instance, he uses highly figurative language typical of literary texts: "My profile suggests those beak-nosed Mayan sculptures – the eaglelike face upturned, open-mouthed, against the desert primitive sky" (123). *Hunger* contains a few Spanish words, but they are always italicised and easily recognisable by an English-speaking audience (e.g. "*los gringos*", meaning "the Anglos", white U.S. nationals). If a word is likely to be difficult to understand, Rodriguez glosses it: "*los braceros*" are "[t]hose men who work with their *brazos*, their arms" (121). Rodriguez can be accurately described as "Chicano" only when this word is used as an ethclass. Using it to describe the kind of literary tradition to which he and *Hunger* belong is misleading since neither of them displays any affiliation to the Chicano movement and its literary output.

Critics Juan Bruce-Novoa, Randy Rodríguez and Christie Launius suggest that the reasons for Rodriguez's dissociation from *chicanismo* are complex and not necessarily reactionary. For Bruce-Novoa, a theorist of Chicano/a identity, Rodriguez's stance is a rejection of "truncating definitions" of ethnicity, that is, models of ethnic identity which are too prescriptive (in Staten 1998: 114*n*). In a 1998 essay, Randy Rodríguez argues that Rodriguez's stance is tied to issues of sexuality. Rodriguez is homosexual and there are strands of Chicano culture which condemn homosexuality (Anzaldúa 1987: 15-25; Rodríguez 1998: 402-404). Therefore, it may be hypothesised that Rodriguez self-identifies as American because, from his own perspective, Chicano culture would reject his sexuality while American culture would be more accepting. In "Late Victorians", one of the essays of *Days of Obligation* (1992), Rodriguez describes the San Francisco of the 1970s as the centre of a "gay-male revolution". Rodriguez cites, for instance, the 1969 Stonewall riots of New

York City “whereby gay men fought to defend the nonconformity of their leisure” and the legalisation of consensual homosexuality in the state of California in 1975 (Rodriguez 1992: 34-35).

Launius, a composition studies scholar, traces Rodriguez’s dissociation from *chicanismo* to gender and to Rodriguez’s inability to fulfil the mandates of Chicano masculinity. The Chicano male relatives amongst whom Rodriguez grew up required men to be like *braceros*, that is, to display physical prowess and to shun assiduous academic work, of which Rodriguez had become fond (137). In adolescence, Rodriguez becomes aware that he “had violated the ideal of the *macho* by becoming such a dedicated student of language and literature” (137). As Launius has pointed out, this creates anxieties regarding effeminacy and masculinity, which Rodriguez resolves by choosing the U.S. middle class (2009: 137, 283-284). The U.S. middle class offered a model of masculinity where the pursuit of literacy at high levels did not lead to emasculation but to power (Launius 2009: 299).

In Chapter 4, “Complexion”, Rodriguez points to the correlation between masculinity, literacy, power and the U.S. middle class by recalling an episode in which a group of Mexican male labourers were underpaid and exploited by their American boss. Rodriguez had witnessed the episode first-hand during a summer construction job that he had taken up to earn extra money and to test whether he could fulfil the characteristics of a *bracero* (140-141). Rodriguez explains how the boss settled the workers’ payment “in cash” and how, although he knew some Spanish, he had addressed them in English using a “loudly confident voice” (145-146). Only one of the Mexicans was able to reply but he spoke in “quiet, indistinct sounds” which reminded the author of when he was a child and could not speak fluent English (146). In this scene, being a *bracero* does not provide the skills to contest exploitation. Implied in the contrast between the boss’s “loudly confident voice” and the workers’ “quiet, indistinct sounds” is the idea that linguistic proficiency and, by extension, literacy, do not make a man effeminate but powerful instead.

The readings by Bruce-Novoa, Randy Rodríguez and Launius are important for at least three reasons. First, they suggest that Rodriguez’s rejection of his Chicano roots and of *chicanismo* lies in questions of identity, gender and sexuality. Certain strands of Chicano culture upheld a model of sexuality and masculinity which, in Rodriguez’s own view, were

too prescriptive and not conducive to the development of his own sense of identity. Second, they suggest that it is possible to assess *Hunger* and its author without resorting to the accusation of conservatism and to a wholesale denigration of one's ethnicity. Furthermore, they lend support to the idea that such an accusation may be the result of a sociocultural and historical conjuncture marked by the presence of Chicano activists who assumed that writers of Chicano origin would automatically subscribe to precise beliefs and codes of conduct. To the presence of Chicano activists, we can add other factors such as the policies implemented by the Reagan administration which, in the 1980s, begun to sweep left-wing values aside (Johnson Gonzalez Jr 2010: 19) and the "culture wars", that is, the publication of books advocating a school curriculum based on dominant white culture (Johnson Gonzalez Jr 2010: 22*n*).[5] In such a conservative cultural climate, a book like *Hunger* could easily be aligned with, to requote Saldívar, "political service to the Right" although other readings are possible.

In the next two sections, I will start to lay the foundation of an alternative reading which uses the lens of class and of intersemiotic conflict. I will start by examining another element that has attracted the charge of conservatism, that is, the way in which Rodriguez represents the world around him. My aim is to illustrate a much-discussed element of the book but also to provide a template for a discussion of the intersemiotic conflict present in *Hunger.* After that, I will discuss the "competing logics" running through *Hunger* and argue that Rodriguez explicitly asks the reader/critic to steer away from the genre of ethnic literature and to turn to the autobiography "about language" (6).

2.2 Rodriguez's controversial view of the world: "the private" versus "the public"

Rodriguez divides the world that surrounds him into two poles: "the private" and "the public". Each pole is made up of a set of antithetical elements which form further

[5] Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (1988) are well-known examples of books that sparked "culture wars" in the U.S.. Both writers advocate an uncompromisingly Western curriculum based on the canon and a few examples of *white* pop culture: "[They] seem to think that most of what constitutes contemporary American and world culture was immaculately conceived by a few men in Greece, around 900 B.C., came to full expression in Europe a few centuries later, and began to decline around the middle of the nineteenth century" (Simonson and Walkers 1988: xv, Simonson and Walkers's italics). NLS scholars prefer to use the term "social" rather than "cultural" in their discussions of literacy to avoid confusion with Hirsh's book, which expresses a diametrically opposed view of literacy (Campbell Peck and others 1995/2001: 574).

dichotomies. Some of these elements are tangible and concrete while others are more abstract. The private includes his own family of origin, his home, the Spanish language, Chicano culture, the working class and disenfranchisement. As the antithesis of the private, the public includes the U.S. nation, the English language, U.S. state institutions (the educational system, state bureaucracy), shops and stores, the U.S. middle class and its culture, agency/power.

For Rodriguez, the private and the public are two distinct chronological phases of his life which do not intermingle. The experience of the private realm coincides with his preschool years while the experience of the public starts when he begins school and will last thereafter. The separation between the private and the public is primarily a psychological state, rather than a physical one. Rodriguez can and does physically move between the two poles, but his identity and his sense of belonging follow an either/or-logic. As Rodriguez himself explains: "For me, there were none of the gradations between private and public society so normal to a maturing child" (15).

Within this dichotomic view of the world, there is one element that straddles both poles: the Catholic Church. Rodriguez devotes the whole of Chapter 3, "Credo", to the role played by this institution in his life. Rodriguez was brought up as a practising Catholic.[6] At home, his parents were "deeply pious" (81), displayed sacred images and crucifixes around the house (87) and involved Rodriguez when praying (in Spanish) to God and the Catholic saints (90). After a brief spell in a Mexican Catholic Church "across town" (86), they began to attend a "*gringo* [Catholic] Church" (86) closer to their home where the Mass was in Latin. Rodriguez's primary school was a grammar school affiliated to his *gringo* Church and managed by Irish nuns and priests who acted both as teachers and as members of the clergy.

During the transition from the private to the public, the Catholic Church was, for Rodriguez, "a place unlike any other" (102). Within it, the components of the private and the public intermingled (87, 102). The Church was an integral part of the private but it was also a powerful institution which influenced people and of which his parents were part (96); it was connected to his school and used not only English and Spanish but also Latin, a

[6] Rodriguez is still a practising Catholic although he is homosexual (Moyers and Rodriguez 2006: 0' 23").

language of power, prestige and elite culture. However, Rodriguez sensed that it could not allow him to "participate fully in American public life" (84). The Church, in other words, shared some of the characteristics of the public but did not afford the same kind of agency that secular institutions could afford. The Church constituted a peculiar microcosm in which elements of the public and the private coalesced without, however, radically impacting Rodriguez's view of the world.

The polarisation of the public and the private was exacerbated by dynamics proper to the Rodriguez family. Rodriguez's parents were not fluent in English and only spoke in Spanish to their children. Furthermore, they had settled in an area of Sacramento populated by "*los gringos*" (English-speaking U.S. nationals) – which was only one block away from a wealthy middle-class neighbourhood (10-11). Rodriguez's parents had settled amongst *los gringos* out of "optimism and ambition" (10), that is, out of hope of upward social mobility and integration with American society. Nevertheless, neither Rodriguez nor any other members of his family mixed with their neighbourhood. Human relationships were only maintained with Chicano relations (11). Rodriguez had contacts with the public, but these only consisted of errands to the grocery shop and the fuel station (13-15). His first sustained interaction with the public was through his primary school. Living far from the *barrio*, his parents had enrolled him in the English-speaking grammar school affiliated to their Church. The school was staffed by Irish nuns and all the pupils "were white, many the children of doctors and lawyers and business executives" (18-19). The classroom was a microcosm of the public and reinforced the split already present in the dynamics of the Rodriguez household.

Notwithstanding his isolation from the public, Rodriguez describes his preschool years as "enchantedly happy" (10). The main source of his happiness was "intimacy", which refers to feelings of affection and closeness that bound his family and relatives together. As Besemeres has aptly noted, the meaning that "intimacy" has in *Hunger* "sounds unidiomatic when used about relations between a child and a parent". In English, "intimacy" implies "closeness of bodies" and "relationships outside the family" (2002: 183). Besemeres argues that the meaning that Rodriguez attaches to it is the result of "transference" from the Spanish word "*intimidad"*, which means "privacy" and which conveys the idea of being set

apart from the public eye (2002: 185-186), an idea that underpins all the elements of the private pole.[7]

The Spanish language and its sounds in particular were, for Rodriguez, one of the main generators of intimacy: "My parents would say something to me and I would feel embraced by the sounds of their words" (15). The relation between intimacy, Spanish and Spanish sounds was so tight that the errands to the shops were experienced by Rodriguez as an unpleasant glitch that disrupted his happiness: "I'd rarely leave home all alone or without reluctance. […]. Nervously, I'd arrive at the grocery store to hear there the sounds of the *gringo* – foreign to me – reminding me that in the world so big, I was a foreigner" (15).

The element that triggers Rodriguez's transition from his "enchantedly happy" private life to the public is the educational system and language learning: these two elements are inextricably linked. Due to his limited English, Rodriguez did not take part in the lessons and struggled to make academic progress. Rodriguez's teachers were concerned and decided to pay a visit to his parents to ask them to speak to their children in English:

> [O]ne Saturday morning three nuns arrived at our house to talk to our parents. […]. From the doorway of another room, spying the visitors, I noted the incongruity – the clash of two worlds, the faces and the voices of school intruding upon the familiar setting of home. I overheard one voice gently wondering, "Do your children speak only Spanish at home, Mrs. Rodriguez?" […]. With great tact the visitors continued, "Is it possible for you and your husband to encourage your children to practise their English when they are at home?" Of course, my parents complied. What would they not do for their children's well-being? And could they have questioned the Church's authority which those women represented? In an instant, they agreed to give up the language, the sounds, that had revealed and accentuated our family closeness. The moment after the visitors left, the change was observed. "*Ahora,* speak to us *en inglés*," my father and mother united to tell us. (19-20)

[7] The word "calque" could be used instead of "transference" since "intimacy" and "intimidad" have a similar morphology and slightly different meanings.

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The period that followed this "intrusion" of the public was traumatic for Rodriguez. In Chapter 1, "Aria", Rodriguez describes an episode in which he entered the kitchen while his parents were having a conversation in Spanish:

> I did not realize that they were talking in Spanish however until, at the moment they saw me, I heard their voices change to speak English. Those *gringo* sounds they uttered startled me. Pushed me away. In that moment of trivial misunderstanding and profound insight, I felt my throat twisted by unsounded grief, I turned quickly and left the room. […]. Again and again in the days following, increasingly angry, I was obliged to hear my mother and father: "Speak to us *en inglés.*" *(Speak!)* (21-22)

Having to use exclusively English had bodily and affective consequences. Rodriguez felt physically rejected by his parents because he had been deprived of the means (speech/ "*(Speak!)*") with which to interact with them and to express how he felt ("unsounded grief"). This made Rodriguez "angry" and, as time went by, it resulted in a loss of intimacy with his parents but, above all, with his father because he found it more difficult to speak English than his mother and often asked her to speak on his behalf (22-24):

> My mother and father, for their part, responded differently, as their children spoke to them less and less. She grew restless, seemed troubled and anxious at the scarcity of words exchanged in the house. […]. By contrast, my father seemed reconciled to the new quiet. Though his English improved somewhat, he retired into silence. […]. Hers became the public voice of the family. (23-24)

Rodriguez turned the trauma from loss of intimacy into determination to learn English and to become integrated in the classroom (21). With the support of daily one-to-one English tuition by the nuns themselves, by the age of seven, Rodriguez had become a

confident pupil who would speak up and be understood by his classmates (21, 27). This confidence, brought about by fluency in English, made possible his identification with the public and the American nation: "At last, seven years old, I came to believe what had been technically true since my birth: I was an American citizen" (22). For Rodriguez, his "Americanization" (27) entailed as a "loss" of the private and its elements (4, 22). Nevertheless, he stresses the "gains" of assimilation into the U.S. linguistic and cultural mainstream (4): upward social mobility and increased agency. For Rodriguez, these "gains" originate from literacy and from the ability to speak and write for a large audience in a way that commands authority: "My teachers gave me a great deal more than I knew when they taught me how to write public English. […] Today I *can* address an anonymous reader. And this seems to me important to say" (204, Rodriguez's italics).

Critics have taken Rodriguez to task over his dichotomic view of the world. Ramón Saldívar, in the essay comparing *Hunger* to Galarza's *Barrio Boy,* does so on political and philosophical grounds. He accuses Rodriguez of "political service to the Right" (1985: 27) and reminds us of the postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard who argues that the private self is always shaped by the public and that it is impossible to draw firm boundaries between them (Baudrillard in Saldívar 1985: 32).[8] For Young, the separation between the private and the public is "false" because Rodriguez's family members who, in *Hunger*, are classified as "private", "are active in engaging dominant culture through a minor position" (2004: 66). The dichotomy private/public oversimplifies social dynamics by creating the illusion of an autonomous self independent of public influences.

Rivera and Petra Fachinger have challenged the polarisation between English and Spanish and have argued that the characteristics that Rodriguez attaches to them are misleading on several counts. Rodriguez "simply attributes negative values to the language and culture of his parents" (Rivera 1984: 9). Spanish is essentialised as a cluster of sounds and a source of isolation, with no recognition that it has a written counterpart, that it is a

[8] Saldívar has also discussed the split between the public and the private by taking into account its literary nature. By drawing on postmodern theories of autobiographical writing, Saldívar reminds the reader that autobiography is an instrument for self-invention and, therefore, "at least in part a fiction" (1985: 29). As I will explain in the next section, this insight can help reconfigure a reception which seeks to stress the book's conservatism. Nevertheless, Saldívar discounts it and takes up the lens of *chicanismo* to expose the reactionary nature of Rodriguez's dichotomic world-view.

language for public discourse and education, and that, by 1930, Mexico had its own distinct and unique cultural production (Rivera 1984: 9). Rodriguez, in other words, represents Spanish as mainly an oral language. Moreover, Spanish does not seem to foster cognitive development. Rodriguez's parents are often infantilised and described as non-thinking beings: "My father and mother did not pass their time thinking about the cultural meanings of their experience" (77). Petra Fachinger, addressing the polarisation of languages from the standpoint of English, argues that Rodriguez makes "mainstream culture the centre of [his] perception" and "essentialise[s] English as a monolithic structure that opens the door to privilege" (2001: 124).

It is difficult to challenge these responses. The great divide between private and public is an inescapable part of the book since it is articulated through a repetition of dichotomies (Spanish/English, Chicano/White American, home/school and shops, parents/schoolteachers, literacy/orality). The polarisation of Spanish and English plays a crucial role in buttressing them because (as Rivera and Fachinger note) Rodriguez sets up what can be called an "interlingual" conflict between these two languages. He recursively stresses their differences and generally frames English as superior to Spanish. Spanish outdoes English only in Rodriguez's own childhood memories and insofar as it is conceptualised as sound. Furthermore, Spanish (both in the book and historically) is coextensive with the construction of Chicano ethnicity and culture, while English is coextensive with White-American ethnicity and U.S. mainstream culture. Consequently, the interlingual conflict between *Hunger*'s languages is conducive to the construction of other conflicts and polarisations. What can be said of Spanish and English can be said of their corresponding ethnicities and cultures and vice versa.

The interlingual conflict that Rodriguez sets up in *Hunger* has played a crucial role in shaping the book's reception because it is central to the narrative and because it is closely related to issues of ethnicity and culture. However, the combined lens of interlingual conflict, ethnicity and culture is likely to lead to interpretations that stress the book's conservatism and Rodriguez's rejection of his Chicano roots. There are other lenses and standpoints from which *Hunger* and Rodriguez can be assessed. Randy Rodríguez and Launius, for instance, by using sexuality and gender, argue that Rodriguez wanted to highlight the conservatism of certain elements of Chicano culture. In the next two sections, by applying the literacy narrative approach and an intersemiotic view of language, I will put

forward an interpretation that differs from mainstream ones. I will start by examining the "competing logics" of *Hunger* and argue that, from the outset, Rodriguez urges the reader to steer away from frameworks based on ethnicity and to interpret *Hunger* by taking up the lens of different genres, including that of the literacy narrative (although he did not use this very term). After that, I will unearth an intersemiotic conflict which transcends ethnic and interlingual boundaries and which is based on social class and literacy practices.

2.3 The competing logics of Hunger of Memory

Literary genres are classifications which provide basic information about the content and style of a text. They emerge when a group of texts starts to be perceived as sharing a set of common characteristics (O'Sullivan 2014: 38, 38*n*). But genres are not just a neutral and convenient shorthand for introducing a text. They influence interpretation. Genre involves definitions (e.g. "an autobiography is a first-person account of…") and definitions provide a ready-made set of concepts which predisposes the reader and the critic to focus on certain elements instead of others. As we have seen, classifying a book as "Chicano literature" is likely to produce interpretations that assess the author's loyalty to his/her Mexican roots. As Ruth Robbins has put it: "[Genre] stabilises the written word, offering the reader a 'horizon of expectations' against which he or she can test and judge the individual work" (2011: 1).

On the on hand, this can be an advantage for literary critics, who are provided with a baseline for interpretation. On the other, it can be an obstacle. Definitions limit what can be said about something because they obscure what does not fit the definition itself. Furthermore, as Jacques Derrida argues in his essay "The Law of Genre" (1980), works of literature and artefacts tend to be generically hybrid and to exceed single definitions (1980: 55). Nevertheless, Western criticism often overlooks hybridity, preferring to define a given work monologically, that is, by using a single genre (Derrida 1980: 55). The implication of Derrida's observations is that genre (if applied monologically) is likely to produce reductive interpretations.

To complicate matters further, genres are unstable. Their definitions can change through time while changes in historical context, literary production and theory can cause

the emergence of new genres. Kaplan, for instance, put forward the genre of the language memoir due to an increase in autobiographical writings about language learning and affect between the 1970s and 1990s, and due to the popularity of postmodern theories about the centrality of language in identity formation. As Kaplan herself notes, before then, a language memoir would have been "discussed in terms of the history of a specific ethnic or national literature, or because language is understood in these books as mere décor in a drama of upward mobility or exile" (1994: 59).

Eldred and Mortensen's notion of the "competing logics of the literacy narrative" – adapted from Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" (in Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 530) – refers to the various generic labels applicable to a text and is designed to address the issue of generic instability in texts that can be classified as literacy narratives. The "competing logics" is particularly relevant for *Hunger* because Rodriguez opens his book with a prologue that foregrounds generic hybridity. The prologue is titled "Middle-Class Pastoral", it is six pages long and outlines the topics that Rodriguez will address in the essays (class, schooling, education, literacy, religion, ethnicity, upward social mobility). Whilst doing this, Rodriguez subsumes *Hunger* under four different well-established generic labels: the pastoral (prologue's title, 4), autobiography (6), the autobiographical essay ("essays impersonating an autobiography" [6]), the parable (6). Rodriguez also advises the reader not to classify *Hunger* as "ethnic literature":

> Let the bookstore clerk puzzle over where it [*Hunger*] should be placed. (Rodriguez? Rodriguez?) Probably he will shelve it alongside specimens of that new exotic genre, "ethnic literature". Mistaken, the gullible reader will – in sympathy or in anger – take it that I intend to model my life as the typical Hispanic-American life. (6)

Finally, Rodriguez puts forward a "new" generic definition which prefigures Eldred and Mortensen's definition of the literacy narrative: "This autobiography, moreover, is a book about language. I write about poetry; the new Roman Catholic Liturgy; *learning to read, writing*, political terminology. Language has been the great subject of my life" (6, my italics).

Later, in the essay "Credo", Rodriguez will add the genre of the "confession" (117).[9] The confession implies the disclosure of sins and wrongdoings on the author's part. Rodriguez casts *Hunger* as a confession because he feels that, by learning English, he "had committed a sin of betrayal" against "his immediate family"; he feels that English "had shattered the intimate bond that had once held his family close" (31) and considers himself responsible for it (31). Furthermore, he argues that he had unjustly benefitted from affirmative action as implemented in higher education. Within this context, affirmative action consisted of governmental policies imposing racial hiring quotas on U.S. universities to facilitate the access of ethnic minorities to a public domain from which they had been largely excluded (164; Kahlenberg 2015: 11-14). Rodriguez does not consider himself a minority because, as we shall see, he equates minorities with the lower classes, poverty, and lack of training in essay-text literacy, rather than with ethnicity.

By accumulating so many genres at the very outset and in such a short space, "Middle-Class Pastoral" draws attention to generic hybridity. In other words, it invites us to interpret the book by using different genre definitions and their competing logics at once. In what follows, I briefly illustrate the interpretative templates provided by each genre, the extent to which some the genres chosen by Rodriguez are already interrelated and, therefore, inherently hybrid, as well as the competing logics that I will take up to tease out the intersemiotic conflict present in *Hunger.*

The prologue's title, "Middle-class Pastoral", alludes to the pastoral, a genre normally grafted onto poetry and which offers an idyllic portrayal of the lives of the lower classes in the countryside. A pastoral stresses differences between the lives of the lower class in rural areas and the lives of the wealthy living in cities/urban areas. Life in rural areas is usually described as more peaceful, closer to nature and, therefore, preferable. The pastoral thus lends itself to being read as a celebration of the former as opposed to the latter. Rodriguez defines his collection of essays as a pastoral because he perceives differences between the language of the working class and that of the middle class. Having been born in a working-class family and having achieved middle-class status in adulthood, he writes to remember the intimacy produced by the language spoken by his family: "I sing Ariel's song to celebrate the intimate speech my family once freely exchanged. In singing the

[9] In Chapter 5, "Profession", Rodriguez alludes once more to the confession and defines the book "an act of contrition" (164).

praise of my lower-class past, I remind myself of my separation from the past, bring memory to silence" (5). At the same time, as pointed out earlier, Rodriguez is keen to stress the advantages of belonging to the middle class and of socialisation in its linguistic practices: "I remember what was so grievously lost to define what was necessarily gained" (5). Rodriguez modifies traditional definitions of the pastoral and steers us towards interpretations that do not idealise the culture and language of his "lower-class past".

Regarding autobiography, Philippe Lejeune has produced the following widely quoted definition: "A retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (1975/1989: 4). Furthermore, to distinguish autobiography from related genres (e.g. biography and fiction), he has argued there must be an identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist (Lejeune 1975/1989: 4-5). Autobiography consists of a narrative (usually in the first person) based on the author's life and which outlines a teleological process of maturation triggered by trials and obstacles (Smith and Watson 2010: 2-3). Since there is identity between the protagonist, the narrator and the author, and it generally makes use of first-person narration, autobiography is endowed with a higher truth-status than literary genres such as fiction (Couser 1995: 34-35; Gusdorf in Anderson 2006: 5). Autobiography, in other words, evokes truthfulness and authority.

Autobiography is strongly related to the genre of the confession. Scholarship on autobiography traces the development of this genre to St. Augustine's *Confessions* (*c.* AD 398-400) (Saldívar 1985: 28; Marcus 1994: 2; Anderson 2006: 18). In this book, St. Augustine tells the story of his conversion to Christianity. He represents himself as a sinner who had put his faith in heretical philosophies and who becomes a better man thanks to redemption through Christ. The movement from sin to redemption prefigures the teleological movement of autobiography, but while the confession couches it in religious terms (from sin to redemption through forgiveness through Christ), autobiography uses more secular criteria (progress, self-reliance, upward social mobility, material success). Since it is narrated in the first person and draws on the author's life, the confession also shares autobiography's higher truth-status. The confession is particularly effective in conveying truthfulness because it weaves "a continuous self-inculpation into the text", which forestalls "inculpation from the outside", that is, from the reader (Staten 1998: 112). In a confession, the author

acknowledges his/her mistakes, which suggests that the truth has already been delivered in an unmediated and self-explanatory way.

The truth-status of autobiography and of the confession is enhanced by the autobiographical essay and the parable. The autobiographical essay is a piece in the first person generally written by intellectuals and academics. It has a distinguished genealogy which includes Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580/1993) and Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637/1998). It is a didactic form which seeks to broaden and/or correct knowledge of a given topic by drawing on the author's life experiences. The parable shares the autobiographical essay's didacticism in that it seeks to expresses a moral and ethical teaching. It is usually associated with the figure of Jesus Christ and, therefore, carries mystical and revelatory connotations. Autobiography, the autobiographical essay, the parable and the confession are interconnected genres which confer authority and a sense of awe on Rodriguez's book. The controversy surrounding *Hunger* may have been exacerbated not only by the cultural climate in which the book was published (*chicanismo*, culture wars, Reagan's policies), but also by Rodriguez's forceful alignment with genres which stress authority, truth and augmented knowledge.

Alongside the pastoral, the confession, the autobiography, the autobiographical essay, Rodriguez adds a "new" hybrid genre, that is, "the autobiography which is also a book about language, writing and learning to read". This definition brings together autobiography and narratives about language acquisition and literacy. At the time of Rodriguez's writing, there were no known generic labels for a text of this kind. Rodriguez had, however, models that helped him conceptualise "a book about language and literacy" as a genre, e.g. Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* (1951/1979), Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les mots* (1964) and Maxine Hong Kingston's semi-fictional autobiography *The Woman Warrior* (1975).

We now have three generic labels for this type of texts – "literacy narrative" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992), "language memoir" (Kaplan 1994) and "language learner narrative" (O'Sullivan 2014). As explained in the previous chapter, each term fosters a different interpretive framework. The language memoir has the critic focus on representations in which language acquisition triggers affective reactions in order to understand the language-identity nexus; the language learner narrative has the critic look for metaphors that express *Mündigkeit* (the ability to think critically and independently). Neither the language memoir nor the language learner narrative accounts for the incidence of literacy in language

learning. The literacy narrative, conversely, is based on the premise that language learning and literacy are never far from each other. What is striking about Rodriguez's "new" generic definition of *Hunger* – "an autobiography which is also a book about language, writing and learning to read" – is its emphasis on literacy (reading and writing), rather than just language and/or language acquisition. Rodriguez, here, can be said to prefigure Eldred and Mortensen's definition of the literacy narrative and to encourage the reader/critic to take up an intersemiotic lens.

Some of the genres under which Rodriguez subsumes *Hunger* can, of course, be defined in a radically different manner and pave the way for different interpretations. The pastoral offers an idyllic portrayal of lower-class rural life but, as Rodriguez himself suggests by stressing the "gains" of middle-class status, the idyll can be critiqued. Raymond Williams addresses this issue in *The Country and the City* (1973/1975) and argues that the pastoral is a highly ideological genre. It is produced by, and for, the upper/middle class (Williams 1973/1975: 22) and seeks to conceal the physical and material hardships of life in the countryside (Williams 1973/1975: 26, 32). Once we acknowledge its ideological import, the pastoral becomes a genre that predisposes the critic to take up the lens of social class and ideology when interpreting.

Autobiography, the confession and the autobiographical essay may inspire awe and authority, but they provide subjective views and experiences and, therefore, a partial truth, rather than *the truth.* As postmodern theories of autobiography have suggested, autobiography is an instrument for self-invention, rather than self-revelation (Couser 1995 38-39). In "Autobiography as De-Facement", Paul de Man argues that the representation of the self is conditioned by the constraints of the semiotic mode of language and the narrative tropes available to the author (1979: 920-921). To the linguistic and literary constraints, we can add the constraints of time. Self-portraiture is a retrospective account subject to the vagaries of memory. Memory can clarify experience but also simplify and distort it. The self of autobiography comes into being during the composition process and may not coincide with the self that existed prior to the composition. From a postmodern vantage point, therefore, interpreting autobiography and the genres that dovetail with it (the autobiographical essay, the confession) involves an examination of the processes whereby the self comes into being in the text and of how the text harnesses literary tropes to produce it.

Regarding the confession, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976/1998), Foucault describes the dynamics underlying nineteenth-century oral confessions about sexuality elicited for clinical purposes. He argues that the confessant never delivered the truth "wholly formed" and that this could only be achieved through an interaction with the confessor, who validated the truth "scientifically" and through "decipherment of what is said" (1976/1998: 66). Put differently, for Foucault, the confession was not an unmediated disclosure. Its meaning, its "truth", was to be established through the interpretive efforts of a confessor who analysed the confession according the pre-existing rules of scientific discourse. Foucault's observations can be extended to the confession as a literary genre. In a literary context, the confession requires a subtle process of decipherment by the reader/critic who comes to the text with his/her own discourses. Foucault's observations share a theoretical ground with postmodern theories of autobiography since they undermine the possibility of unmediated truth and authenticity.

To summarise what we have said about genre and *Hunger* so far, Rodriguez subsumes his book under several and interrelated generic labels. He defines *Hunger* as an autobiography, a confession, an autobiographical essay, a pastoral and as "a book about language and learning to read and write", thus, prefiguring the "literacy narrative". Moreover, he overtly dissociates it from "ethnic literature". By doing this, he alerts us to the presence of competing interpretations, and he advises us not to use the lens of ethnicity. Nevertheless, the reception of *Hunger* has indeed been dominated by this lens and by that of English and Spanish, a lens that I have defined as "interlingual" since it is based on two different national/natural languages. In what follows, by using some of logics of the genres chosen by Rodriguez, I will offer an interpretation which makes use of an intersemiotic lens and which aims to highlight a conflict between semiotic modes and literacy practices originating from social class. From the pastoral, I will take the lens of class and ideology; from the confession, I will take the necessity of careful decipherment; from autobiography, I will take the postmodern concern with processes of self-invention.

Highlighting processes of self-invention is particularly important if we want to revise the reception of this book. *Hunger* has been heavily criticised because of its dichotomic representation of the world. Processes of self-invention suggest that Rodriguez's dichotomies may be a rhetorical device intended to convey a state of mind, rather than an objective and reliable view of the world. Interestingly, Saldívar, one of Rodriguez's earliest

and fiercest critics, has himself noted, by drawing on postmodern theories, that autobiography is an instrument for self-construction and, therefore, that *Hunger*'s dichotomy private/public is "at least in part a fiction" (1985: 29). Nevertheless, Saldívar does not pursue this interpretive path and takes up the lens of ethnicity and of *chicanismo* instead. This is yet another token of the hold that the lens of ethnicity has had on the reception of this book but also of the possibility of pursuing alternatives.

2.4 Intersemiotic conflict in Hunger of Memory

Critics Rolando Romero (1991), Henry Staten (1998) and Renny Christopher (2002) have written essays which engage the relation between *Hunger*, literacy and class. Christopher has discussed the link between standard language, nonstandard language and class; Romero and Staten have looked at *Hunger* through the lens of literacy and semiotic modes (without, however, drawing on New Literacy Studies, or theories of multimodality). Their interpretations partly overlap with the reading I propose here. Therefore, I will begin by briefly summarising them.

In "Rags to Riches to Suicide: Unhappy Narratives of Upward Social Mobility", Christopher adds to *Hunger*'s competing logics by arguing that this book is an example of U.S. working-class literature (2002: 79-80). In U.S. working-class literature, dichotomies that pit the world of the working class against that of the upper/middle class are not a deplorable index of conservatism but widely used tropes expressing extra-textual realities, namely, radical differences in material means, agency, language and cultural patterns between social classes. According to Christopher, Rodriguez delineates a split between standard language (which he associates with the middle class) and nonstandard language (which he associates with the working class) (2002: 101-102) and stresses the difficulties that he encountered when trying to replace one with the other. *Hunger*, Christopher maintains, is a book that "emphasise[s] the sense of loss that haunts upward social mobility" (2002: 80).

By drawing on "An American Writer", a 1989 autobiographical essay by Rodriguez himself, Christopher suggests that Rodriguez was not brought up speaking standard Spanish but a nonstandard variety of it: "[T]he Spanish I had gathered at home was as different from conventional standard Spanish as Appalachian white English is different from the English

used in the University of Virginia" (Rodriguez in Christopher 2002: 101). Rodriguez had probably been brought up speaking what scholar Gloria Anzaldúa calls "Chicano Spanish", a dialect of Spanish widespread amongst working-class Mexicans. Chicano Spanish is so different from standard Spanish that it is considered by some as "deficient, a mutilation of Spanish" (Anzaldúa 1987: 77-78). Chicano Spanish is viewed in this way because of discrimination against Chicanos and because it deviates from the grammatical rules, syntax and vocabulary of standard Spanish. Like any dialect and language, Chicano Spanish has its own grammar and syntax (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1992: 154-155) but it is viewed as "deficient" because standard Spanish is taken to be the benchmark (the norm) as well as the variety of Spanish which affords social agency and linguistic capital (Janks 2014: 53-55; Janks and others 2014: 58).

In *Hunger*, Rodriguez tends to refer to the Spanish that he gathered at home simply as "Spanish". Put differently, he does not explicitly distinguish between standard and nonstandard Spanish/dialects of Spanish. However, on one occasion, he defines his first language as "a ghetto Spanish":

> I'd hear strangers on the radio and in the Mexican Catholic Church across town speaking in Spanish, but I couldn't really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English. […]. It was thus a ghetto Spanish that I heard and spoke. (14)

It is reasonable to assume that "ghetto Spanish" means "Chicano Spanish" since Rodriguez arrives at this definition after a comparison with the Spanish heard on the radio and at Church, two institutions that tend to champion standard language. Christopher's essay, therefore, suggests that Rodriguez sets up a conflict not only between English and Spanish but also between standard and nonstandard variants of a given language and concomitantly, between grammatically correct and ungrammatical language.

Concerning Romero and Staten, they both argue that Rodriguez pits written English against spoken/oral Spanish and, in particular, against the sounds of Spanish (Romero 1991: 89-90; Staten 1998: 110). They frame this conflict as an intertextual reference to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and to the phenomenon of "phonocentrism" (also known as "phonologocentrism" and "phonologism") (Romero 1991:

97-96). Phonocentrism is traceable to Aristotle (Derrida 1967/1997: 11; Brockmeier and Olson 2009: 14-15) and refers to the idea that speech is superior to writing because "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (Brockmeier and Olson 2009: 14). In other words, speech is superior because it is closer to the essence of experience while writing is a corrupted form of speech that only approximates what speech can express more directly (Derrida 1967/1997: 11, 17-20, 101-102).

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that phonocentrism is endemic in much Western thought, from the French enlightenment (Rousseau), to German idealism (Hegel), phenomenology (Husserl) and structuralism (de Saussure, Lévi-Strauss). Derrida takes issue with phonocentricism. Prefiguring the tenets of multimodality, he argues that writing and speech are distinct semiotic modes, each with their own rules (Derrida 1967/1997: 314) and that positing speech as superior to writing is part of a wider Western project that privileges the immaterial and the mind (e.g. voice, speech) over the material, the tangible and the body (e.g. letters, writing) (Derrida 1967/1997: 11-12, 314-315).

Romero and Staten argue that *Hunger* can be read in reference to phonocentrism because Rodriguez represents Spanish sounds as a means which can effectively express mental and sensory experiences. The sounds of the Spanish that Rodriguez spoke in his preschool years convey "intimacy" in a way that no other sounds can replicate. Romero cites the scene in which Rodriguez is asked by an English-speaking playmate to translate something his grandmother had said to him in Spanish, calling out from the window. Rodriguez decides not to translate: "The message of intimacy could never be translated because it was not *in* the words she had used but passed *through* them" (31, Rodriguez's italics). Spanish sounds have a surplus meaning that words (whether spoken or written) cannot express. Their meaning lies in the sounds themselves, in their "music". Like Derrida, Romero and Staten argue that such a view of language is erroneous. Romero sees it as an effect of the logic of the pastoral, as an idealised representation of Rodriguez's Chicano family and their language (1991: 93, 98), while Staten claims that Rodriguez "detaches it [Spanish] from any wider sociocultural reference" (1998: 110). As Rivera did a few years earlier, Staten criticises Rodriguez for not acknowledging that Spanish has a written counterpart and that it exists in both the private and the public.

The readings by Christopher, Romero and Staten suggest that Rodriguez does not treat English and Spanish as monolithic entities but that he refracts them, distinguishing between standard and nonstandard language/dialect, grammatical and ungrammatical language, language-as-writing, language-as-speech and language-as-sound. Rodriguez, in other words, represents language not just as a compound of national/natural languages but also as a compound of language-based semiotic modes which adhere in different ways to the rules of grammar extrapolated from standard languages. By applying the literacy narrative approach, it is possible to build on these readings and to explore how these semiotic modes interact with each other to give rise to multimodality and to form two literacy practices which I will refer to as "essay-text literacy" and "the oral mode".

When applying the literacy narrative approach, it is helpful to begin by getting an overview of the semiotic modes that are represented in the texts alongside national/natural languages. As Romero and Staten have pointed out, alongside the interlingual conflict between Spanish and English, Rodriguez pits written language against oral language/speech. Speech dovetails with both Spanish, English and the language of Rodriguez's Catholic Church, Latin. Rodriguez makes reference to two aspects of speech: sound, understood as the "music" that words make, and "speech before writing", that is, speech perceived as a stretch of discrete and meaningful sounds which does not necessarily reflect how words appear in print and writing. While it does not to rule out an awareness of words as they appear in, say, a dictionary, "speech before writing" is not bound by it because it relies on the sound of words and their "music" for communication and meaning-making. It refers, in short, to a way of apprehending language not dictated by the rules of linguistic standardisation but by individual perception.[10]

In "Credo", the essay about religion and Catholicism, Rodriguez suggests that "speech before writing" was part of his communicative resources. At the age of twelve, Rodriguez started to serve as an altar boy at his Catholic church where Mass was in Latin. The altar boy was required to respond in Latin to antiphons (spoken prompts) by the priest. Latin was "a tongue foreign to most Catholics", including Rodriguez (105). Therefore,

[10] "Speech before writing" should not be seen exclusively as a trait of oral societies (societies without a writing system). People living in literate societies may still perceive language as a stretch of meaningful sounds. They may also know that the sounds have a written counterpart, but this may not be relevant for them since they rely on "music" for meaning-making.

Rodriguez memorised the Latin responses in "blank envelopes of sound: *Ad day um qui lay tee fee cait u vent u tem may um*" (105, Rodriguez's italics). The words in italics are Rodriguez's own written rendition of the sounds and words that make up the Latin sentence "Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam" (To God, who gives joy to my youth). Rodriguez overrides conventional spelling and spacing to create his own "envelopes of sound". These are described as "blank" to emphasise his reliance on the sonic dimension of Latin rather than the written and standardised one. In *Hunger*, Rodriguez does not provide the grammatically correct Latin version in order to startle the reader and to draw attention to the dynamics of "speech before writing".

Although perceiving words and language as sounds and "music" involves neither reading nor writing, it can be defined as a literacy practice since it involves various semiotic modes and it takes place in a context in which literacy is present (the Mass). During his preschool years, Rodriguez relied extensively on this sonic literacy practice:

> I was a listening child, careful to hear the different sounds of Spanish and English. Wide-eyed with hearing, I'd listen to sounds more than words. (12)

> Until I was six years old, I remained in the magical realm of sound. […]. But then […] I left home for school. At last I began my movement toward words. (40)

Rodriguez, here, suggests that awareness of words was the end result of a learning process triggered by schooling after the age of six. For Rodriguez, before words and schooling, there were the sounds of words and "speech before writing".[11]

The chronological marker "until I was six years old", nevertheless, should not be taken as a reliable detail. Living in a literate society, Rodriguez had probably developed an awareness of language-as-words and language-as-writing before primary school. The

[11] The original title of the book was *Toward Words* (in Eakin 1992: 129), which points to the centrality of semiotic modes and literacy. The title *Hunger of Memory* gestures toward something completely different: nostalgia and idealisation of the past. *Hunger of Memory* may have been chosen instead of *Towards Words* because nostalgia is likely to appeal to a wider readership whilst issues of semiosis may only appeal to specialists/academics.

unreliability of this marker becomes clear if we compare it to the previous citation from "Credo". When Rodriguez uses "blank envelopes of sound" to make meaning from Latin, he is twelve and, therefore, well into his journey towards words. This contradiction suggests that Rodriguez is simplifying his language learning experiences and that he is likely to have experienced language-as-sound and language-as-words simultaneously and in a more confused way. Rodriguez turns simultaneity and confusion into a teleological movement towards an end state due to the logic of autobiography and the process of self-invention that typifies this genre.

Teleological movements are also a feature of literacy narratives. As Eldred and Mortensen have pointed out, literacy narratives are often modelled on the "literacy myth", the idea that literacy "necessarily leads to economic development, cultural progress and individual improvement" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 512). Many literacy narratives can be read as stories of positive transformations. From the vantage point of the literacy narrative approach, however, the literacy myth is a misleading conceptualisation of literacy. An interpretation based on the literacy narrative approach, therefore, would also view Rodriguez's chronological markers and the teleology that they express as oversimplifications. Alongside this, it would focus on battles over literacy practices and semiotic modes. Put differently, it would focus on the fact that, as child, Rodriguez apprehended language mainly through sound, rather than words as codified by print, and that schooling caused Rodriguez to develop a different way of acquiring language.

Out of the six autobiographical essays that form *Hunger*, it is "Aria", Chapter 1, that addresses the role of language-as-sound at length. The word "aria" itself points to the sonic dimension of language. "Aria" is an Italian word that means "air"; it is also used in the context of the opera to refer to a sung piece. Rodriguez uses "aria" to suggest that what is at stake is the sounds that words and speech make. Sounds are related to air because they need air to travel and, like air, they cannot be seen; they are also related to an operatic "aria" because they are delivered orally, received aurally and, through prosody, can produce a kind of music and rhythm comparable to a sung piece.

The sounds of Spanish and English were meaningful aural/oral signs for Rodriguez. He had created his own "private" codification and could extract meaning from them. English was "very loud", "firm and clear" (12) and "never pleasing" (13); it was made up of "exotic polysyllabic sounds" and "high nasal notes" (12). When Rodriguez heard these sounds, they

meant "*los americanos*" (11), "the middle class" (12) and "the great city" (15). Spanish sounds are described with an antithetical set of characteristics. They are "soft-sounding" (16), "softer" (13) and made up of the "twirling roar of the Spanish *r*" (17). When a family member "would say something", Rodriguez would feel "especially recognised" and "embraced by the sounds of their words" (15). For Rodriguez, Spanish sounds meant contentment and, as I have said previously, "intimacy" (37).

An instance of Rodriguez's reliance on the sounds of Spanish words for semiosis and communication occurs at the end of "Aria", where he describes his visits to his maternal grandmother, his "one relative who spoke no word of English" (37):

> My grandmother searched for me among my many cousins. […] Then she'd take me to her room, where she had prepared for my coming. There would be a chair next to the bed. […] And a copy of *Life in Español* for me to examine. "There," she'd say. I'd sit there content. A boy of eight.[12] I'd sift through the pictures of the earthquake-destroyed Latin American cities and blond-wigged Mexican movie stars. And all the while I'd listen to my grandmother's voice. She'd pace around the room, […] telling me stories of her life. Her past. […] I'd look up sometimes to listen. Other times she'd look over at me. But she never seemed to expect a response. (I understood exactly what she was saying.) […] The words she spoke were almost irrelevant to that fact – the sounds she made. Content. (37-38)

To highlight the tight relation between sound, meaning and contentment/intimacy, in this exchange, Rodriguez plays with the polysemy of the word "content". If we place the word-stress on the first syllable (cóntent), it means "meaning"; if we place it on the second syllable (conténT), it means "happy", satisfied both emotionally and physically.

[12] In this scene, we have another example of the logic of the autobiography and of the literacy narrative. Rodriguez is eight and has already started primary school; therefore, he should already have moved "toward words" and abandoned the realm of sound. However, as noted earlier, the movement from sounds to words is likely to have been a gradual process whose chronological boundaries are difficult to establish. Since it took Rodriguez "a full year of special attention" (i.e. one-to-one English lessons by the nuns) and since this started when Rodriguez was almost seven (19), at the age of eight, sound may still have been an important meaning-making mode.

Interestingly, its polysemy is realised only when the word is pronounced and transformed into a sound; in writing, it can only be realised by using a diacritic mark. Rodriguez does not use diacritics and thus preserves the ambiguity. "Content", like "aria", points to the saliency of sound and to the extent to which the "music" of spoken words can carry meaning/content.

Rodriguez's visits to his grandmother can be described as a multimodal encounter. Sound coexists with other semiotic modes: image in the guise of pictures/photos, bodily gestures (Rodriguez and his grandmother looking at each other), oral words/speech (the words uttered by Rodriguez's grandmother) and print/written words (the copy of *Life in Español*). Out of all these modes, it is sound that has the most salience. However, sound is aided by other modes. Glance and eye-contact enhance the intimacy between Rodriguez and his grandmother while the pictures in *Life in Español* serve to illustrate her stories about Mexico. The mode that is the least salient is print/written words.

The literacy practice that emerges from this scene can be defined as "the oral mode", or as "primary discourse". These terms were coined by James Paul Gee to denote a literacy practice that develops in childhood and through primary socialisation (family, clan, peer group), that only makes marginal use of print and literacy and that may include nonstandard standard language and dialects (1989/2001: 541). Gee argues that we *all* learn an oral mode in our early years and that, as we grow, we are required to learn "secondary discourses" in order to interact with institutions and people other than our immediate community of origin/family (1989/2001: 527/528). "Secondary discourses", Gee observes, rely more on literacy, print and standard language; therefore, can be very different from the oral mode. According to Gee, not all social groups acquire secondary discourses in the same way. Questions of ethnicity, social class, gender, culture, geography, family habits and identity can affect how we learn secondary discourses (1989/2001: 528). Some people may never fully acquire secondary discourses and rely mainly on the oral mode throughout their lives (1989/2001: 532-533).

This dynamic is applicable to Rodriguez's parents. As Rolando Romero has noted, "[w]ritten Spanish […] is hardly ever mentioned" (1991: 90). Rodriguez's parents were not illiterate. They could "read and write both Spanish and English" (62) and his mother was "an excellent speller of [English] words she mispronounced" (57). However, reading was

"done out of necessity, as quickly as possible" (55; 62) and consisted of "income tax forms", "letters airmailed from Mexico", "work manuals, prayer books, newspapers, recipes" (62). In "Credo", Rodriguez specifies that, at home, Catholic prayers were not learned from prayer books but orally (86). He also explains that his parents did not read bedtime stories to him. When, one day, a fourth-grade friend tells him that his parents read *Winnie the Pooh* to him every night, Rodriguez asks him "What is it like?" (55). Rodriguez wants to know about the experience of bedtime storytelling but his friend, assuming that bedtime stories are a universal practice, explains the plot of the book instead (55). Print and written Spanish were scarce in the Rodriguez household and, most importantly, they were not an important part their daily lives.

When Rodriguez starts primary school, he is exposed to a literacy practice (and a secondary discourse) that is radically different from the oral mode. This is how Rodriguez recalls his encounter with the classroom:

> I easily noted the difference between classroom language and the language of home. At school, words were directed to a general audience of listeners. ("Boys and girls.") Words were meaningfully ordered. And the point was not self-expression alone but to make oneself understood by others. The teacher quizzed: "Boys and girls, why do we use that word in this sentence? Could we think of a better word to use here? Would the sentence change its meaning if the words were differently arranged? And wasn't there a better way of saying much the same thing?" (I couldn't say. I wouldn't try to say.) (19)

Here, Rodriguez is representing a grammar lesson. He is being taught syntax ("Words were meaningfully ordered"), synonyms ("Can we use a better word here?), active and passive voice ("Does the meaning of the sentence change if I rearrange the words?"). He is also learning how to communicate effectively in the public ("And the point was not self-expression alone but to make oneself understood by others"). Rodriguez's grammar lesson alludes to a literacy practice that, following Gee, I have called "essay-text literacy" (Gee 2008: 82). Essay-text literacy is very different from the oral mode because it involves

adherence to the grammar of standard language, training in reading print and in writing long pieces of prose which can be understood by the wider public.

Grammar plays a crucial role in differentiating the oral mode from essay-text literacy and in defining essay-text literacy itself. Grammar can be defined as a set of rules which helps to distinguish correct from incorrect language and which produces "symbolic language", that is, language that commands authority and respect (Bourdieu 1982/1991: 54, 66, 170). At the same time, it can be viewed as a language in its own right. Grammar is metalanguage, language about language. It consists of specialised vocabulary for classifying words, sentences, punctuation and rules for putting them together. Grammar's vocabulary is normally learned through schooling and is so specialised that is rarely used outside of this context. As a result, it may be very difficult to master because it requires socialisation in literacy practices which may not be available, or of interest, to everyone.

Furthermore, grammar is closely linked to standard languages (Graff 1987: 47, 117, 238, 276-277; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2006: 53-54), literacy and the semiotic mode of writing. As Bruce Homer notes, "[o]f the many cognitive skills that have been linked to literacy, none has been as closely associated with learning to read and write as metalinguistic development" (2009: 487). Homer reminds us of the theories of Lev Vygotsky and David Olson who have argued that "literacy brings aspects of language into consciousness" (in Homer 2009: 487). Writing provides a visual and static representation of language which facilitates the analysis of language itself and the extrapolation of grammatical rules. Grammar can be extrapolated from speech too, but speech is less suited to this task because it is dependent on sound and, therefore, more ephemeral and fleeting. Because of grammar, learning essay-text literacy is an extremely complex and demanding process which involves the acquisition of several languages at once (metalanguage, standard language) and of the semiotic mode of writing.

Literacy scholar Victoria Purcell-Gates, who has studied the relation between preschool years and "success at beginning formal instruction in reading and writing" (1997: 41), argues that that this latter is dependent on the kind of contact that one has had with print and reading *before* school. Academic success, in other words, depends on early exposure to key aspects of essay-text literacy. Although we are all born into the oral mode/primary discourse, children start to learn about reading and writing from birth provided they can observe others using print for various purposes and provided adults

allowed them to join in with these activities (Purcell-Gates 1997: 46-48). Written language, Purcell-Gates argues, is "not ubiquitous to all" but "recognised or noticed only to the extent that is used by fellow members of one's sociocultural/sociolinguistic group" (1997: 50). Implied in this is the idea that if you are born in a group/family well-versed in essay-text literacy, you will probably acquire this practice more easily because your oral mode already matches aspects of essay-text literacy.

From all this it follows that, for Rodriguez, the classroom was a disorienting and traumatic experience not only because the lessons were in English but also because exposure to print was scarce in his household. His parents did not involve him in literacy-based activities that fostered metalinguistic awareness such as bedtime reading. Rodriguez was brought up in a family in which the oral mode was the main literacy practice. Consequently, he had not developed skills that facilitated the acquisition of essay-text literacy. Rodriguez was not aware that that the sounds heard around him (whether *gringo* or Spanish) could be written down in a fixed way, that language, through writing and print, could become an object of study and that it was possible to learn the rules of public discourse. The pain and trauma that Rodriguez describes in *Hunger* originates, of course, from a conflict between language (Spanish and English) but also from a conflict between the literacy practices and semiotic modes of his family and those of the education system and the public realm.

Rodriguez is ambivalent about whether conflicts between the oral mode and essay-text literacy are experienced by all school children in some degree, or whether they are caused by his own background. On the one hand, in "Aria", he suggests that there is always a difference between literacy practices learned in preschool years (primary discourses) and those learned at school, regardless of one's sociocultural and socioeconomic ascription: "It is not possible for a child – any child – ever to use his family's language in school. Not to understand this is to misunderstand the public uses of schooling" (10). On the other hand, in Chapter 2, "The Achievement of Desire", Rodriguez ties the oral mode with the working class and essay-text literacy with the middle class and, therefore, suggests that it is more difficult for working-class children like himself.

In "The Achievement of Desire", Rodriguez draws a parallel between his language learning experiences and those described by Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), an autobiographical academic text. Hoggart was born in Leeds (UK) in 1918 into a working-

class family. *Uses* examines the literacy practices of Northern working-class families in the early and middle years of the twentieth century, positing a great divide between them and those championed by the classroom (Hoggart in Rodriguez 48). Hoggart expounds his ideas through the figure of the "scholarship boy", a boy from the working class who is determined to achieve academic success although he is aware of radical differences between his background and the classroom (Hoggard in Rodriguez 48). The scholarship boy values "the intense gregariousness of the working-class family" (Hoggart in Rodriguez 49) but, at the same time, he is aware that, through formal schooling, he is learning to value print and literacy in a way that he cannot share with his immediate family. Rodriguez identifies with Hoggart's scholarship boy and uses it as a model for writing about his own language learning experiences: "[L]eafing through Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, I found, in his description of the scholarship boy, myself. For the first time […] I was able to frame the meaning of my academic success, its consequent price – the loss" (48).

Rodriguez's parallel with the scholarship boy suggests that essay-text literacy is always more difficult for working-class children. Rodriguez, in other words, traces the intersemiotic conflict of *Hunger* to class divides. The link between literacy practices and class has been endorsed by ethnographic studies of literacy such as Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983) and Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life* (2003). It is important to note that neither Heath nor Lareau frames working-class practices as deficient, or inferior. Rather, they suggest that these have their own specific function and affordances. Heath and Lareau highlight differences to understand why some children fail in school. On the one hand, this is also Rodriguez's intent. By representing how semiotic modes and literacy practices interact with each other, Rodriguez suggests that academic obstacles are not solely interlingual but also intersemiotic and traceable to class divides. On the other, Rodriguez is not as open to difference as Heath and Lareau.

Rodriguez "regionalises literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 525). Instead of stressing that literacy is plural and that there are many types of literacy and many ways of engaging texts, he associates literacy with a particular place/region and illiteracy to that which lies outside of it. Literacy is associated with the public and its elements: essay-text literacy, the education system, the U.S. middle class. Illiteracy is equated with the private and its corresponding elements: the oral mode, the working class, Chicanos, and his parents. Rodriguez defines himself as someone who has developed "the ability to consider

experience […] abstractedly" thanks to his "long education" (77). His parents, as we saw, are infantilised and described as people with limited cognition and incapable of abstract thinking because they lacked the kind of education that Rodriguez had (77).

Rodriguez's regionalising of literacy rehearses the theories formulated by Ong in *Orality and Literacy*. For Ong, "illiterate subjects" (2012/1982: 50), that is, people living in oral societies, develop "situational" thought processes. They are only able to conceptualise experience through tangible, concrete objects and find it difficult to articulate self-analysis (2012/1982: 50-57). Conversely, literate people, thanks to writing, develop a flair for abstraction and self-analysis (2102/1982: 54-55).[13] Rodriguez's regionalising of literacy further reinforces the widespread idea that *Hunger* is a reactionary book written by a reactionary writer. Nevertheless, it does not cancel out the thesis that Rodriguez provides a lucid account of ideology in language learning and literacy. In the following section, by linking Rodriguez to social and NLS theory, I will argue that, notwithstanding its conservatism, Rodriguez offers a lucid analysis of the workings of power and ideology in language acquisition and literacy.

2.5 Hunger of Memory reworded

Sociolinguistic research has now established that all varieties of a language are, in principle, equal: they are all rule-governed systems and the standard variety of a language is a dialect amongst many others. William Labov (1972), for instance, has challenged arguments about the linguistic deficit of Black English by demonstrating that it enables logical reasoning in the same way as the standard variety and that it can express concepts that the standard variety cannot express. Similarly, NLS research has established that there are many literacies and many literacy practices, each with its own specific function in relation to social context, epistemology, affect and identity formation.

[13] The same applies to Hoggart's *Uses.* As Ruth Robbins has pointed out, on the one hand, Hoggart tells "a kind of truth about lives lived in scarcity"; on the other working-class lives are "figured as typical, or even stereotypical – or, more crudely, as the life of the herd" (2005: 140). Hoggard denigrates the working class. He suggests, for instance, the working-class home does not have a quiet room for studying because this "would require an imaginative leap – out of tradition – which most families are not capable of making" (Hoggart in Rodriguez 49). Hoggart links the lack of a study to a lack of imagination although its primary cause is the lack of financial means to buy a house spacious enough to accommodate a study. Hoggart equates limited material means with limited cognition and lack of essay-text literacy and thus can be said to regionalise literacy in the same way as Rodriguez.

In *Hunger*, Rodriguez paints a complex communicative and semiotic landscape in which Spanish, English, sound, image, words, "music", literacy and speech interact with each other to form language-as-sound, the oral mode and essay-text literacy. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that linguistic and communicative diversity does not lead to equality but to a "linguistic market" (1982/1991: 54). The notion of "linguistic market" refers to the different levels of prestige and capital afforded by languages and literacy practices. For Bourdieu, "[w]ords, utterances are not only […] signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority***,** intended to be believed and obeyed" (1982/1991: 66, Bourdieu's italics). Alongside their referential meaning, words and utterances have a surplus meaning that provides the speaker/writer with agency and access to material privileges. The linguistic market is a structure that defines which words, utterances, literacy practices afford the most power and privilege (1982/1991: 54). Since no language/literacy is intrinsically superior, the power afforded is "symbolic", that is, it depends on people recognising and reinforcing its legitimacy (1982/1991: 170).

In *Hunger,* Rodriguez narrates an incident that exemplifies the dynamics of the linguistic market and his family's position within it. His mother was a trained, and very fast, typist. When her four children began primary school, she got a well-paid job for a government anti-poverty agency (57, 59). Having Chicano Spanish as her first language, and her ethnicity, affected her power and status in the workplace. Although she was "an excellent speller of [English] words", she mispronounced them (54, 57) and spoke English with a Spanish accent (13). Because her English pronunciation was nonstandard and accented, "her co-workers wouldn't let her answer the phones" (57). Furthermore, while typing a letter from a dictating tape, she once typed "gorillas" instead of "guerrillas", a Spanish loanword. "Guerrilla", ironically, is often mispronounced by U.S. speakers in a way that sounds like "gorilla". Consequently, there is a sense in which the mistake was made by the person who had recorded the tape and not Rodriguez's mother. Nevertheless, the mistake "horrified the anti-poverty bureaucrats" who demoted her (57-58).

If Rodriguez's mother had had standard English as their first language, she would have been allowed to answer the phone. Moreover, the "spelling mistake" would probably have been treated more leniently. In her case, it had more serious consequences because her Spanish accent and her ethnicity had already positioned her as inferior. Rodriguez's

mother was bilingual and literate but certain aspects of the languages she spoke and of the literacy practices into which she had been socialised did not command authority and positioned as inferior. In *Hunger*, Rodriguez privileges English and essay-text literacy because he understood how the linguistic market worked. In particular, he understood that his family Chicano Spanish and the oral mode stood at the bottom of the linguistic market and that, if he had not mastered English and print, it would have been very difficult for him to branch out beyond in his community of origin.

Rodriguez's representations of the dynamics of the linguistic market is not intrinsically conservative and can become the basis of a pedagogy and a cultural outlook which embrace a variety of languages and literacy practices. In her book *Literacy and Power,* Hilary Janks argues that understanding the dynamics of the linguistic market is crucial for a more inclusive literacy instruction. Janks is a linguist and an educator based in Johannesburg in South Africa, a country where there are as many as eleven official languages, not counting the unofficial ones. Unlike Rodriguez, Janks believes that "[n]o children should have to lose the language/s of their homes as they cross the threshold of school" (2010: 145). For Janks, children should have the opportunity to learn both standard and nonstandard languages, dominant and nondominant literacy practices. Learning additional languages "has to mean that a new habitus and identity is acquired *in addition to* that of one's primary discourse" (Janks 2010: 148, Janks's italics).

Janks has turned her ideas into a pedagogy called "critical literacy". Critical literacy is based on the premise that linguistic diversity "is structured in dominance" and that "not all discourses/genres/languages/literacies are equally powerful" (2010: 26). Furthermore, it draws on Freire's work and harnesses "words […] to transform the world" (Freire 1970/1996: 69). It promotes the acquisition of both powerful/dominant literacy and nondominant literacies and makes explicit of the reasons why dominant forms came to be dominant. Janks believes that linguistic diversity without access to powerful forms "ghettoises" students (2010: 26). In other words, Janks acknowledges, like Rodriguez, that nonstandard languages and practices such as the oral mode hinder access to the mainstream and thus perpetuate patterns of exclusion. Unlike Rodriguez, however, she works to gradually undermine the structure of the linguistic market. Janks devises teaching material that enables nondominant literacies to be integrated in the school curriculum, she redesigns nondominant practices by adding features from dominant practices and vice versa

and she raises awareness of the sociohistorical processes that caused some language varieties to become dominant.

Some of the foundations of Janks's critical literacy (power, access, diversity, redesign, the linguistic market) can be found in Rodriguez's critique of affirmative action in the context of higher education. As Kristina Meshelski explains, affirmative action is an umbrella term for policies issued by the U.S. federal government from 1964 onwards to ensure that the public sector and higher education complied with Civil Rights legislation (2016: 427). By 1972, these polices had taken the form of hiring and admission quotas "for the representation of women and specific racial groups and timetables for reaching those goals not only in construction firms with government contracts, but also in public hospitals and universities" (2016: 427). In Chapter 5, "Profession", Rodriguez describes the context that led to affirmative action: "[A]lthough no official restrictions denied blacks access to northern institutions of advancement and power, for most blacks this freedom was only theoretical. (The obstacle was 'institutional racism.'). Activists made their case against institutions of higher education" (154). Hiring and admission quotas were considered the solution to the underrepresentation of minorities in positions of power. Therefore, it became a legal requirement for universities to admit a fixed number of minority students and teaching staff (155).

For Rodriguez, affirmative action as it was implemented in higher education was founded on a flawed theory of power because it disregarded the issue of class and its discriminatory effects.[14] Rodriguez argues that class should always be considered alongside race because it cuts across racial differences.[15] Further, like race, it influences academic success at the beginning of one's education, which then impacts access to higher education:

> To improve the education of disadvantaged students requires social changes which educational institutions alone cannot make, of course.

[14] Affirmative action and, in particular, the question of quotas have been a highly controversial subject in the U.S. since, according to some, it gives minorities "advantages they no longer need" (Beeman and others 2000: 99; see also Kahlenberg 2015). However, it must be noted that quotas were declared unconstitutional in the 1978 *Bakke* case and that, since 1995, quota programmes have been reviewed and replaced by "strict scrutiny" of racial bias (Beeman and others 2000: 99, 111).

[15] Here, Rodriguez can be said to prefigure the concept of "intersectionality" popularised by Black feminist scholarship in the late 1980s. "Intersectionality" refers to "the ways in which the social categories of gender, ability, age, race, sexuality, nationality and class symbiotically reinforce one another to produce marginalised subjects" (Okolosie 2014: 108).

> Parents of such students need jobs and good housing; the students themselves need to grow up with three meals a day, in a safe neighbourhood. But disadvantaged students also require good teachers […]. Teachers who are not overwhelmed; teachers with sufficient time to devote to individual students; to inspire. (162-163)

Widening the access of minorities at university level was only marginally useful in resolving problems of discrimination because it neglected two important issues. Firstly, it did not take into account that higher education is the end point of a process that depends on success in primary and secondary education; secondly, that pathways to these systems are affected not only by race but by a combination of factors that include social class and the quality of teaching. *Hunger'*s pro-assimilation argument is thus not driven by an uncritical endorsement of powerful literacies and linguistic forms but by a lucid assessment of affirmative action and the linguistic market. *Hunger* is driven by the realisation that promoting linguistic diversity without an understanding of power is unlikely to achieve any radical change.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, reading *Hunger* as a conservative book by a conservative writer is the result of an interlingual and ethnic lens and that other interpretations are possible. By using the literacy narrative approach, the idea that language is "multimodal" (comprising writing, sound, the "music" of speech, image) and the lens of class, it is possible to identify a conflict which I have described as "intersemiotic" because it involves literacy practices and the semiotic modes that form them. In particular, I have argued that Rodriguez sets up a conflict between the oral mode and essay-text literacy and that he suggests that working-class children find schooling more difficult because they are less exposed to essay-text literacy than their middle-class counterparts. From the vantage point of literacy practices, *Hunger* ceases to be a reactionary book and becomes, instead, an insightful representation of the dynamics of Bourdieu's linguistic market.

In the next chapter, I discuss another literacy narrative that, like *Hunger*, represents essay-text literacy and its effects on the learner: the Italian novel *Nuova grammatica*

finlandese by Diego Marani. Marani represents essay-text literacy in a radically different way. While Rodriguez never questions the cognitive and material advantages provided by essay-text literacy, Marani challenges them. Essay-text literacy hampers both cognitive and emotive development and is framed as a tool for political indoctrination. Instead of leading to Scribner's "state of grace", it leads to extreme nationalism, self-destruction and a loss of diversity.

CHAPTER 3: THE LETTER KILLS, SINGING GIVES LIFE: LITERACY AND MULTIMODALITY IN DIEGO MARANI'S *NUOVA GRAMMATICA FINLANDESE*

Figure 2 Grammar in sixteenth-century iconography[1]

The image above is a sixteenth-century representation of grammar, understood as a discipline rather than as a property of *all* languages, however obscure or nonstandard (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2006: 52-53). As a discipline, grammar examines and renders explicit some of the principles that regulate how letters and words combine to produce intelligible utterances and texts. It has developed via the study of elite languages (Greek and Latin) and of those vernaculars that have attained the status of national and standard languages (Graff 1987: 47, 117, 238, 276-277; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2006: 53-54).The study of grammar has long been a staple of language acquisition and literacy in the West. Latin and Greek grammar was the mainstay of the education of the sons of the wealthy in second-century Rome; the Romans, in turn,

[1] Source: Romberch (1533: 119)

had inherited this practice from the Greeks (Graff 1987: 26-27). Language that adheres to the principles identified by grammarians tends to be considered as the norm to be followed. Consequently, teachers, learners, and language users from across the ages have turned to grammar to distinguish correct usage from mistakes, both in speech and writing.

In this image, grammar is envisioned as a woman called Gramatica. In the company of three birds, Gramatica has a stern expression, one foot perched on a ladder, a scalpel and a pair of pincers at the ready. Her right hand grasps one of the birds by its neck, choking air and life out of it. These are metaphors expressing what grammar learning entailed in the sixteenth century. Grammar was part of a gendered literacy practice involving mainly noblemen, clergymen, male scholars and aspiring professionals (doctors, lawyers, apothecaries) who, through the study of grammatical rules, learned to read, write, and speak Latin (Ong 1982/2012: 110-113) and their own emergent vernaculars (Burke 2004: 94-97). The scalpel and the pincers prompted teachers and students to be ruthless towards mistakes. The slightest departure from grammatical norms had to be eliminated with surgical precision (Rose 1989: 1-2). The ladder reminded them that mastery of grammar was fundamental for academic and professional success (Burke 2004: 89-91). The bird dying of asphyxiation was a warning. Students had to leave the spontaneity and the "music" of everyday speech behind and to model their voice on the norms of grammar.

Once its metaphors are unravelled, Gramatica becomes a disturbing image which conveys notions of ideology and coercion, both mental and physical. Grammatical norms have precedence over personal expression and inclinations. This is, of course, offset by the hope of success, of "getting to the top" of the ladder, but at what cost! Even the most benign of errors and "flight" of spontaneous speech must be suppressed since failure to do so may lead to the bottom of the ladder.

How representations of grammar have changed since the sixteenth century! A modern-day version of Gramatica could be the YouTube advertisement of "Grammarly" ("Enhance your Writing: Grammarly": 2017), a free software designed to highlight and correct grammar, style, spelling, and punctuation as you type. Besides a change of medium (from static image to moving image with sound and voiceover), there is a change in the connotations conveyed. Gone is the sense of coercion and

competition. Gone are the references to hierarchies and to the suppression of the spontaneity of speech. Instead, the advertisement features confident students and smiling executives who have found in Grammarly a friendly ally who helps them to climb to the top.

These differences are more a reflection of changes in our perception of grammar and literacy instruction than a reflection of qualitative changes in their dynamics. As social historian Graff has argued, the discourses underpinning nineteenth-century mass literacy campaigns have popularised the "literacy myth", the idea that literacy instruction is the gateway to individual and societal progress in all areas of life: cognitive, cultural, political, economic, and spiritual (Graff 1979). Furthermore, many discussions of literacy tend to be structured by the metaphor of the "state of grace" (Scribner 1984), that is, tropes that reinforce the literacy myth by associating literacy with enhanced cognition, ethical behaviour, progress, and personal success.

As the word "myth" suggests, such beliefs and rhetoric can be misleading. Literacy is a complex social and ideological practice which does not always lead to a "state of grace". Gramatica's scalpel and stranglehold are still with us and can be found even in the Grammarly advertisement. The very fact that we need a software that manages grammar for us suggests that studying it and getting it right is *hard* work. (Gramatica has a *stern* expression, in fact.) We may also want to ask ourselves which language variety the software uses (standard languages or dialects? Standard Spanish or Chicano Spanish?) and why the lower classes do not feature. Does this mean that they cannot write/speak correctly and that their ideal place is the bottom of the ladder?

At present, it can be difficult to overtly represent and/or acknowledge issues of ideology due to a historical conjuncture which tends to idealise literacy, language learning and representations thereof. This implies that when we interpret, we are likely to produce reductive readings and, by extension, that it is important to use a framework that accounts for the ideological dimension of literacy and language acquisition. This thesis is based on the premise that by using the "literacy narrative approach" (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3), it is possible to read representations of literacy

and language acquisition against the grain of constructs such as the literacy myth and its rhetoric to produce novel and thought-provoking interpretations.

In this chapter, I discuss Diego Marani novel's *Nuova grammatica finlandese* (2000). Set against the backdrop of the Second World War in Europe, *Grammatica* tells the story of Sampo, an amnesiac and aphasic young man who tries to regain his identity and the ability to speak with the help of a doctor, Petri Friari, a Lutheran pastor, Olof Koskela, and a nurse, llma Koivisto, who give him Finnish lessons. *Grammatica* has largely been read as a poignant and well-crafted story which addresses topical issues such as the language-identity nexus and exile. By applying the literacy narrative approach, I argue that *Grammatica* is a literacy narrative that in fact deconstructs the literacy myth. I read *Grammatica* as an allegorical rendition of the historical processes that have caused a grammar- and standard language-based literacy practice called "essay-text literacy" to gain ascendancy over other literacy practices. I argue that Marani draws on Benedict Anderson's concept of "print-capitalism" formulated in *Imagined Communities* (1983/2016) and that he traces the dominance of essay-text literacy to nineteenth-century nationalism and its strong relation with schooling. I also argue that essay-text literacy is represented as a loss of semiotic resources and that the novel conveys this through the storyline, its narrative structure and its materiality.

This chapter is divided into five sections. In Section 1, I introduce Marani as an author, insert *Grammatica* within his literary output and position it as a literacy narrative. Section 2 is about the reception of novel. I argue that scholars and critics have not sufficiently acknowledged the centrality of language acquisition and literacy and that they have resorted to all sorts of generic classifications to describe *Grammatica*, some of which are misleading. In Section 3, I apply the tool of the "competing logics" to the text (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 529) and I argue that, alongside the literacy narrative, the novel, the allegory and the confession are the genres most conducive to a reading of *Grammatica* as a text about essay-text literacy, nationalism and loss of semiotic resources. Section 4 establishes a link between *Grammatica* and Benedict Anderson's study of nationalism *Imagined Communities* (1983/2016). I argue that Marani reformulates some of its insights via fiction and the allegory. In Section 5, I unravel the allegorical meaning of *Grammatica* by examining

the "operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 516). I argue that *Grammatica* represents a conflict between two kinds of literacy practices: essay-text literacy and a sonic literacy practice based on group singing, music, and sound. I argue that Marani frames the latter as the most conducive to identity formation and that he achieves this effect by associating these practices with diametrically opposed sets of ideas. Essay-text literacy is linked to insanity, suicide, *angst*, nationalism, and the male gender; sonic literacy is linked to cognitive and physical wellbeing, transnationalism, and female ways of apprehending language.

Overall, the aim of this chapter is to highlight the benefits of reading literacy narratives against the grain of the literacy myth and of acknowledging that literacy is an ideological phenomenon tied to history. Put differently, this chapter seeks to show the importance of working at the interface between representation and extra-textual reality and of using historical studies of literacy to shed light on how authors represent this phenomenon. If we do this, *Grammatica* ceases to be solely an original narrative about, say, the relation between language and identity and becomes, instead, an epistemological tool that helps us understand the processes through which essay-text literacy has overshadowed other literacy practices.

3.1 Diego Marani and Nuova grammatica finlandese

Diego Marani is a contemporary Italian novelist and a blogger for *Eunews: l'Europa in italiano* (*EUnews: Europe in Italian*).[2] He has worked as a translator for the European Commission and, more recently, as an officer of cultural diplomacy, again for the European Commission. Marani is known as a writer but also as the inventor of "Europanto". Europanto can be defined as a transnational and hybrid language. It mixes vocabulary and structures from a variety of European languages (mainly French, English, German, Spanish, Dutch and Italian) without any one being dominant. Europanto is also a subversive language since it overrides the norms of grammar and spelling. Marani has written works entirely in Europanto: these include *Las Adventures des Inspector Cabillot* (1998), a collection of humorous detective short stories

[2] Source: *Eunews: l'Europa in italiano* <https://www.eunews.it/> [accessed 21 May 2018]

published in France in 1998, and a series of witty sketches for the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* (e.g. Marani 2001).

In a 2009 lecture, Marani defined Europanto as "un simple jeu, une provocation"[3] and as "un antidote contre l'intégrisme linguistique"(Marani 2009: 5).[4] Europanto is linguistic play with a political message, which Marani has explained (in Europanto) as follows: "[E]ine definitiva soluzio por eine efficace und pleasante communication intra persons van differentes languages die bypasse Englanto. […] Om Europanto te speakare, tu basta mixare alles wat tu know in extranges linguas" (Marani in Pireddu 2007: 41). Through Europanto, Marani wishes to challenge the dominance of global English and to suggest that speakers of different European languages can communicate with each other regardless of fluency and grammatical accuracy because their languages have much in common. Nevertheless, as Nicoletta Pireddu has noted: "Despite its allegedly liberating agenda, Europanto is accessible to readers with a grasp of foreign languages, and its composition also tends to privilege the most frequently used European languages to the detriment of less common ones" (2006: 360). Europanto thus assumes a working knowledge of widely studied European languages. Further, although Marani frames it as an oral language ("Om Europanto te speakare"), it is a written literary language used only by Marani himself. Europanto's practical applications are very limited and its value as an invented language lies in its political message.

Alongside publications in Europanto, Marani has published a total of fifteen novels and travel writings in Italian. *Nuova grammatica finlandese* (2000/2012) is his third novel. It was published in Italy in 2000 and has been translated in ten different countries. It reached the U.K. in 2010 as *New Finnish Grammar* thanks to the publisher Dedalus and a translation by Judith Landry. *Grammatica* has been awarded several literary prizes both in Italy and the U.K.. In Italy, it won the "Premio Grinzane Cavour" (now known as the Premio Bottari Lattes Grinzane); in the U.K., it featured in *The Guardian*'s 2011 "Bestsellers List" (in Marani 2010: n.p.; Casati 2011: n.p.). In 2012, Landry's translation won the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize (awarded by the Queen's College and St Anne's College, Oxford). During the same year, it was

[3] Just a game, a provocation.
[4] An antidote against linguistic integralism.

shortlisted for "Best Translated Book Award for Fiction" (awarded by *Three Percent*, a literary magazine of the University of Rochester, U.S.) and the Independent Foreign Fiction Award (now known as the Man Booker International Prize) (in Marani 2010: n.p.; Casati 2011: n.p.).

In *Grammatica,* we do not find the same humour as the writings in Europanto, but, like Europanto, it raises issues regarding linguistic norms and grammar. *Grammatica* is set against the backdrop of the Second World War in Europe. It opens in Trieste (Italy) in September 1943, but it soon takes us to Helsinki (Finland) just before the Russian invasion. *Grammatica* is a novel characterised by a pervasive sense of alienation and *angst*. The protagonist is a young man allegedly called Sampo who, due to a severe head injury, is affected by amnesia and aphasia (the inability to speak). Sampo cannot remember anything about his identity and cannot communicate, which results in alienation and depression. His predicament is particularly hopeless since he is found unconscious on the Trieste quayside with no identity markers except a sailor's jacket with the Finnish-sounding words "Sampo Karjalainen" embroidered on it.

Sampo is taken onto a hospital ship docked in Trieste and put into the care of Petri Friari. Friari is a Finnish-born naturalised German neurologist who left Finland with his mother at the age of twenty-three (25).[5] Friari's expatriation was linked to the 1918 Finnish civil war which saw a conflict between communists and nationalists. The war was won by the nationalists who took merciless repressive measures against their opponents. Friari's father, a university professor who had communist leanings, was arrested and executed. For fear of retaliations, Friari and his mother sought refuge in Hamburg (25). Judging by the words embroidered on Sampo's jacket and by his knowledge of the Finnish language, Friari concludes that his patient's name is Sampo Karjalainen and that he is Finnish. To help his recovery, Friari decides to teach him his mother tongue. In a few weeks, Sampo learns the first rudiments and, although he

[5] Citations from *Grammatica* are from the 2012 edition by Bompiani and, from now, they will only be followed by the page number in round parentheses. The English translations are from the 2010 translation by Landry published by Dedalus. They will also be followed only by the page number.

finds it very difficult to express himself, he is soon able to understand and remember what Friari says to him (28).

To speed up his recovery and the acquisition of Finnish, Friari sends Sampo to Helsinki where he will be looked after by another doctor, Mauno Lahtinen, at Helsinki military hospital. After a long journey through war-torn Europe, Sampo arrives in Finland. Although Lahtinen is away at the front, Sampo is allowed to make the military hospital his home. Here, he is befriended by the Lutheran pastor Olof Koskela and the Finnish nurse Ilma Koivisto. Both Koskela and Koivisto take it upon themselves to help Sampo by teaching him Finnish.

Thanks to his teachers, Sampo's Finnish improves. The young man can interact with people in Helsinki and starts to write his memoir in a school notebook, the same notebook that he uses for his Finnish lessons. The memoir is not a coherent piece of prose, but one that draws from different, registers, media and semiotic modes:

> É scritto in un finlandese accidentato e scarno, spesso sgrammaticato, raccolto in un quaderno scolastico dove le pagine di prosa si alternano a liste di verbi, esercizi di grammatica finlandese e ritagli dell'elenco telefonico di Helsinki. Alcune pagine sono illegibili, altre riportano soltanto sequenze di parole senza alcuna logica apparente, disegni, nomi stranieri, titoli ripresi dall'"Helsingin Sanomat". Spesso la narrazione è svolta utilizzando brani ricopiati dai giornali, ripetuti ogni volta che una situazione analoga si ripresenta e integrati con altri, dei più svariati registri linguistici. (9) [6]

[6] It is written in a spare indeed broken and often ungrammatical Finnish, in a school notebook where pages of prose alternate with lists of verbs, exercises in Finnish grammar and bits cut out from the Helsinki telephone directory. Some pages are illegible, others contain just sequences of words without any apparent logic, drawings, foreign names, and headlines taken from the *Helsingin Sanomat.* Often the narrative proceeds by way of scraps cut out from newspapers, repeated each time a similar situation occurs, and fleshed out by others, in a wide range of registers. (9)

Notwithstanding his efforts, Sampo cannot recover any clues about his identity and keeps battling depression and alienation. To make matters worse, Sampo loses some of his most important reference points. One day, Koskela, whom he considers to be his "unico amico" (only friend) (182), leaves to join the Finnish army without warning anyone. Shortly after, Sampo discovers that "Sampo Karjalainen" is the name of a ship (193). He thus gives us up hope of finding who he was and decides to enlist in the Finnish army as well. Sampo's decision is a suicide. Sampo knows that he will die on the battlefield, but death is what he seeks because (paradoxically) dying fighting for Finland will provide him with a name and an official identity on a tombstone: "Sulla croce che pianteranno sulla mia tomba, il nome che porto sarà finalmente mio. Mio soltanto. Mio del tutto" (198-199).[7]

Shortly after Sampo's death, Friari solves the puzzle of the young man's identity. Sampo was an Italian soldier called Massimiliano Brodar. Brodar was clubbed on the head by Stefan Klein, a German secret agent. Since Germany and Finland were allies during the Second World War, Klein had worked on the Finnish war ship "Sampo Karjalainen" and owned a jacket with the ship's name embroidered on it. Klein was asked to carry out a secret mission for Germany and needed an Italian uniform, so he attacked Brodar, took his uniform and dressed the Italian soldier in his own clothes (201-202). When Friari learns the truth, he goes to Helsinki to deliver the news but Sampo is already dead. Friari finds Sampo's memoir in a trunk. Friari feels responsible for Sampo's suicide (11) and, as an act of atonement, many years after Sampo's death, he decides to publish it: "Ci sono però voluti molti anni perchè mi decidessi, ormai vecchio e senza illusioni, a rendere pubbliche queste pagine (accompagnate dalle annotazioni che allora vi aggiunsi) prima che scompaiano assieme a me per sempre" (10).[8] To make the memoir comprehensible to a wider audience, Friari rewrites it. He turns it into a coherent and poignant narrative made up exclusively of grammatically correct writing and literary prose in standard Italian. Furthermore, he adds several sections where he recounts his own life and his recollections of Sampo's life (10-11).

[7] On the cross which they will place upon my grave, the name I bear will at last be mine. Mine alone; completely mine. (181)

[8] But it was many years before I could bring myself to offer these pages to the public (together with the annotations I added at the time) before they vanished, and me with them, once and for all. (10)

Grammatica has a complex diegetic structure with a story within a story. It consists of a (fictional) language memoir composed by Sampo but edited by Friari. Sampo's memoir is embedded within a memoir by Friari which acts as the frame narrative. Sampo's memoir takes up most of the novel. But Friari's narrative introduces and closes it. Moreover, it recursively interrupts it with Friari's own authorial intrusions. These include descriptions of his past life in Finland and Germany, of the changes made to the young man's memoir and his own recollections of the events narrated by Sampo. The intrusions are easily distinguishable from Sampo's narrative since they are printed in italics.

Although Sampo's and Friari's narratives constitute two different diegetic levels, their boundaries are unstable. On the one hand, Friari leads us to believe that the rewriting is a reliable rendition of the memoir that the young man composed in Helsinki: "La mia conoscenza dei fatti che hanno ispirato questo memoriale mi hanno permesso di ricostruire la storia che racconta, di riscriverla in una lingua corretta e resturarne il contenuto " (9-10).[9] On the other, we are aware that the memoir has been heavily modified by Friari: "Spesso ho dovuto intervenire profondamente sul testo, aggiungendo brani di mio pugno per collegare vicende rimaste slegate" (10).[10] Due to the doctor's emendations, Sampo's memoir as he composed it is unrecoverable. Friari has a great deal of control over the narration and full control of the editing process. He can, therefore, be viewed as the author of the book that he intends to publish and of Sampo's memoir as well. Notwithstanding this instability, in my analysis of *Grammatica*, I will assume that the sections attributed to Sampo express aspects of Sampo's memoir and that Friari's control over the book draws our attention to literacy practices and to the differences between the materiality of Sampo's memoir and Friari's version of it.

Alongside the narratives by Sampo and Friari and their corresponding diegetic levels, we have, of course, a third diegetic level, namely, that of Marani, the author of *Grammatica*. There is a sense in which Marani's diegetic level (just like Sampo's) could

[9] My knowledge of the facts which lay behind this document has enabled me to reconstruct the story that it tells, to rewrite it in an orthodox language and to fill in some of the gaps. (9)
[10] I myself have often had to intervene, adding linking passages of my own to tie up unrelated episodes. (9)

overlap with Friari's. The references to the publication of Sampo's memoir position the doctor as the implied author of *Grammatica*. This suggests that Marani may be using him as his mouthpiece. Nevertheless, the language in which the novel is written (Italian) discourages us from doing this because we know that Friari is only fluent in German and Finnish. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Marani wishes the reader to keep the diegetic levels separate and to envisage Friari as separate from him.

In *Grammatica*, scenes of schooling, literacy and language acquisition are central to the main narrative. Friari speaks of the special bond with his first language (57) and of how he managed to keep his proficiency in Finnish by befriending Finnish sailors in Hamburg (121-122). Sampo describes his Finnish lessons in detail so that we can reconstruct the pedagogies and learning aids used by each teacher as well as their effects on him. The title itself (*Nuova grammatica finlandese*/*New Finnish Grammar*) frames the book as a grammar manual, a widely used aid for both first and second language learning. From the reader reviews posted on Amazon.co.uk and Goodreads we learn that when sally tarbox (2014: n.p.) and Lachlan (2013: n.p.) first came across *Grammatica* (in its English translation) in a bookstore, they thought that it was a misclassified book from the language learning section. Tellingly, you can also come across Marani's novel when searching for an actual grammar manual of Finnish. If you enter the words "grammatica finlandese", or "Finnish grammar", in the search box of, say, online booksellers La Feltrinelli and Waterstone's, *Grammatica* will appear in the search results together with actual grammar books.

Marani himself claims that the book was inspired by a personal language learning experience involving Finnish (Kirkham 2012). In 1996, Marani was sent by the E.U. to Finland for seven months to learn the language. Marani found it extremely difficult because Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language while all the languages that he knew back then were Indo-European ones (Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch). Finnish was completely unrelated to them both grammatically, lexically, and in the world-view expressed. Marani explains that he felt "the loneliness of being outside a language" (in Kirkham 2012: 20' 39"). Marani, like Sampo, experienced alienation due to lack of language and he tried to reconstruct this state of mind in the novel (in Kirkham 2012: 20' 39").

Grammatica is a text which Eldred and Mortensen could have used alongside *Pygmalion* to stake out the genre of the literacy narrative. It is also a text that Helen O'Sullivan could have used to exemplify the language learner narrative and the interrelation between linguistic proficiency and *Mündigkeit* (the ability to think independently and critically) since Sampo (who is aphasic) is completely dependent on his teachers and cannot decide for himself. Nevertheless, *Grammatica* has not drawn the attention of scholars researching literary texts about language acquisition, nor is it studied on U.S. composition courses like *Hunger of Memory* is. In short, it has never been classed as an example of literacy narrative. In the next section, I survey the reception of the novel and argue that the centrality of language acquisition and literacy has been overlooked in favour of other, more popular, themes (e.g. language, nationalism) and that this has resulted in reductive interpretations.

3.2 The reception of Nuova grammatica finlandese: from tragic story about language and identity to cannibalistic pulp fiction

Although *Grammatica* has been awarded important literary prizes, its reception is mixed. Some critics have presented it has a novel with a well-crafted plot onto which Marani grafts a poignant story about topical issues. In the French newspaper *Libération*, *Grammatica* is defined as "un roman poignant and dérangeant sur la langue et l'identité" (2003: n.p.).[11] For Kate Saunders, writing for *The Times*, it is a book "about language and identity, loss and retrieval. […]. Beautifully written and translated, and beautifully original" (2011: n.p.).[12] Italianist Sabina Gola, following the critic Giovanni Pacchiano, situates Marani amongst "i dieci migliori scrittori del Duemila" (2001: 207) [13] and describes him as a representative of "narrativa d'invenzione" (2001: 207), that is, fiction in which identity formation depends on memories of an invented past. Elsewhere, Gola (2002) and Clément Lévy (2011) have defined *Grammatica* as an example of exile literature since its protagonists are both

[11] A poignant and disturbing novel about language and identity.
[12] For similar reviews, see Panzieri (2000), Amoroso (2000), Lindenberg (2003), Robshaw (2011).
[13] The best ten writers of the year 2000.

exiles: Friari had to flee Finland following the 1918 civil war while Sampo was sent to a country that was not his real country of origin.

Rosie Goldsmith and Nicoletta Pireddu have argued that *Grammatica* is a novel about nationalism and nation-building. For Goldsmith, Marani was fascinated "by the myth-building of a young nation-state" (2011: n.p.). In "Scribes of a Transnational Europe" (2006), Pireddu defines *Grammatica* as a "tragic story" (2006: 364) and argues that Sampo dies because of the "obsessive belief in identitarian self-sameness" (2006: 365) fostered by nationalist politics. According to Pireddu, therefore, the novel expresses the importance of developing a transnational identity which embraces linguistic and cultural hybridity. In a later essay, "Passing for Europe: Linguistic Transvestism and Transnational Identities in Marani's *Nuova Grammatica Finlandese*", Pireddu builds on this reading and highlights the role of language within nationalism. She argues that Marani denounces "the fake naturalness of the nation-state and its co-optation of language in the service of patriotism and nationalism, hence an obstacle to the broader conception of *fatherland* at which Europeanisation aims" (2007: 39, Pireddu's italics).

Other critics have been less enthusiastic and have taken Marani to task over lack of thematic, stylistic, and generic coherence. In an article for the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, Stefano Bartezzaghi defines *Grammatica* as a "romanzo" (novel) that mixes an "apologo anti-nazionalistico" (antinationalistic apologue)[14] with a "storia tragicomica" (tragicomic story) stemming from Friari's errors and Sampo's involuntary exile (2000: 2). Bartezzaghi argues that Marani gets the balance between genres wrong. He privileges the antinationalistic apologue and thus spoils the novel's comic dimension, which, for Bartezzaghi, is the novel's main strength (2000: 2). Matthew Reynolds has criticised Marani for having written a novel that, being in "seamless literary Italian throughout" (2013: 119), does not reflect, in "the texture of the writing", either "linguistic difference" (which, for Reynolds, is the main theme of Marani's fiction) or the hybridity of Europanto (2013: 119).

[14] According to the OED, an "apologo/apologue" is "a moral fable, especially one with animals as characters". A well-known example of apologue is Aesop's fables, where animals stand for human strengths and weakness and ethical dilemmas. Although there are no animals in *Grammatica,* the parallel with the apologue suggests that *Grammatica*'s storyline has a secondary level of signification. This is consonant with the idea that *Grammatica* can be read an allegory.

Like Reynolds, Philippe Daros has taken issue with the novel's style and language. For Daros, *Grammatica* is a "fable" about la "fin de l'Histoire" (the end of History). "La fin de l'Histoire" is an allusion to Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992/2012) where Fukuyama, in the light of the rise of free market capitalism after the Cold War, declares the impossibility of ever achieving equality and democracy (2005: 233-236). Daros sees *Grammatica* as a fable about the "end of History" because of its pervasive *angst* and because Sampo decides to kill himself. Regarding its style, he argues that the novel has "[c]ontradictions peu maîtrisées" (awkward contradictions) (2005: 236) because, in his view, a text about the end of History should challenge the possibility of telling a coherent story through its language (2005: 236). In other words, Marani should not have used literary and grammatically correct Italian but a more experimental language. Daros also draws a parallel between *Grammatica* and the short stories of the controversial anthology *Gioventù cannibale* (*Cannibalistic Youth*, or *Young Cannibals*). Published by Einaudi in 1996, *Gioventù cannibale* was inspired by Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Its short stories are centred on sadistic violence, senseless murder, sex, and substance abuse (Daros 2005: 236-237; Sanò 2015: 23-26) and are described by Daros as "superficiel" and "de faible valeur littéraire" (superficial and of little literary value) (2005: 236). Implied in the parallel with *Gioventù cannibale* is the idea that *Grammatica* is a poor work of literature.

Within this mixed reception, language acquisition and literacy rarely feature. When they do, they are mentioned in passing. Judith Lindenberg, for instance, notes that Marani renders Sampo's language learning experience "avec un précision clinique" (with clinical precision) (2003: 228), but she argues that the book is about the nexus between language, identity and place of origin (2003: 228). Pireddu defines Friari, Koivisto and Koskela as characters who provide Sampo with a "linguistic education" (2007: 34). Furthermore, as explained earlier, she argues that the novel is a "denunciation of the nation-state co-optation of language in the service of nationalism" (2007: 39). Pireddu's statement partly overlaps with the argument proposed here since I suggest that *Grammatica* is an allegory of the ascendancy of essay-text literacy following nineteenth-century nationalism. Nevertheless, her ideas draw from theories of transvestism about the instability of identity and gender

categories. For Pireddu, the novel is more about the importance of developing "an identity strategically conceived as a plurality of vested voices" (2007: 35) than the processes whereby we become literate beings and language users.

The reception of *Grammatica* can thus be subdivided into two very different categories. On the one hand, there are critics who hold that *Grammatica* is an original novel by a skilled writer and that it addresses important existential and political issues such as exile, identity formation, and nation-building. On the other, there are critics who suggest that *Grammatica* is a poor work of literature because Marani does not match his chosen theme to an appropriate genre and/or style. Both categories provide reductive interpretations since they overlook the centrality of representations of language acquisition and literacy. However, the second category is more reductive than the first. *Grammatica* is not a poor work of literature because of an ill fit between theme and style/genre. Rather, it is the critics themselves who lack a generic label and theoretical framework for a text which focusses on language acquisition and literacy. In this thesis, I argue that "literacy narrative" is the label that should be used for such texts and that these should be interpreted via a framework called the "literacy narrative approach". Only by doing this can the critic pin down the meaning of the text. One of the analytical tools of the literacy narrative approach is the "competing logics of the literacy narrative", that is, the genres under which the text can be subsumed. Identifying the genres of a text is important because it provides guidelines for interpretation. It is, therefore, to the competing logics of *Grammatica* that I now turn.

3.3 The competing logics of Nuova grammatica finlandese

Critics have already classified *Grammatica* under a variety of generic labels. In the foregoing section, we encountered the novel (Bartezzaghi 2000), the apologue (Bartezzaghi 2000), the fable (Daros 2005), the comedy (Bartezzaghi 2000), cannibalistic/pulp fiction (Daros 2005), "narrativa d'invenzione" (Gola 2001) and exile literature (Gola 2002; Lévy 2011). Not all of them are pertinent classifications though. Moreover, there are others which are more suitable for *Grammatica*, namely, the allegory, the confession and, of course, the literacy narrative.

The "narrativa d'invenzione" and exile literature are not pertinent because they require the critic to focus primarily on the role of memory and exile instead of language, literacy, and language learning. They, in other words, cause the critic to bypass the very core of the text. The comedy and cannibalistic fiction labels grossly misrepresent the book. In *Grammatica*, alienation, suicide, *angst* and the destruction caused by the war neutralise any comic undertones that Friari's errors of judgement may have. Regarding cannibalistic fiction, *Grammatica* does contain references to senseless death via the war and to substance abuse, since, as we shall see, Koskela is both an alcoholic and a drug addict. However, they are occasional and not as graphic as in the short stories of *Gioventù cannibale.*

The apologue and the fable are both misleading and pertinent. They are misleading because they tend to use animals as metaphors for human's strengths and weaknesses and *Grammatica* does not use this technique. They are pertinent because they point to the presence of a level of signification which is alluded to by the storyline but not overtly represented in the text. In this chapter, I argue that, in *Grammatica*, characters, events and places are metaphors and metonymies which refer to the relation between nationalism, literacy, and print-capitalism. A genre that is based on networks of allusions, metaphors, and metonymies without necessarily using animals and which is, therefore, applicable to *Grammatica* is the allegory.

Wolfreys and others define the allegory as "extended narratives that produce secondary meanings regarding the story that exists on the surface; otherwise, a form of indirect representation (perhaps best summarised as analogical rather than mimetic)" (2014: 6). The allegory has two levels of signification: the surface/primary level, which corresponds loosely to the plot; and a deeper/secondary level on which the plot can be recast as a narrative alluding to larger, extra-textual phenomena that are not explicitly named/represented. *Grammatica* has never been classified as an allegory. Nevertheless, Sergio Pent, writing for *Tuttolibri* (*La Stampa*'s literary supplement), points to it. He argues that "[l']anno è il 1943, ma potrebbe essere oggi, o fra cent'anni" (2000: 4).[15] Pent, here, suggests that the chronological and historical

[15] The year is 1943, but it could be today, or the distant future.

markers of *Grammatica* exceed their immediate referents and, consequently, that it is possible to speak of a secondary narrative below the storyline.

Another key characteristic of the allegory is the mode of fantasy writing. Well-known allegories such as St. John's *Revelation* (*c*. AD 95) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*c.* 1321) contain fantastical creatures and supernatural events. Critic and novelist Matthew Reynolds argues that fantasy writing is a characteristic of much of Marani's fiction but *not* of *Grammatica* (2013: 120). Reynolds discusses *L'ultimo dei Vostiachi* (2001) (winner of the 2002 Stresa Prize and published in English in 2013 as *The Last of the Vostyachs*) and *L'interprete* (published in 2004, but not yet translated into English). *L'ultimo dei Vostiachi* is set in Siberia and Helsinki and tells the story of Ivan, the last speaker of a (fictional) Finno-Ugric language about to become extinct. Ivan becomes the research target of two linguists who compete for information about his language so fiercely that one kills the other. *L'interprete* is about the possibility of a universal language (of the kind that existed before Babel) and focusses on a E.U. interpreter who suddenly starts to speak in an unknown tongue which turns out to be the language of dolphins. Reynolds argues that these novels adopt the mode of fantasy writing because some of their details defy disbelief (2013: 120). In *L'interprete*, it is the idea of a universal language; in *L'ultimo dei Vostiachi*, it is Ivan's exploits. For instance, when Ivan is brought from his native Siberia to Helsinki for a conference, he decides to return home by crossing a frozen lake on an improvised sledge pulled by a reindeer and parading the corpse of the murdered linguist.

I both agree and disagree with the distinctions that Reynolds draws between *Grammatica* and these novels. I agree since, in *Grammatica*, there are no supernatural events such as characters bursting forth into the language of dolphins. I disagree because, as Joanna Kavenna has argued in a piece for *The Literary Review, Grammatica* has "utter disdain for the conventions of literary realism" (2011: n.p.). *Grammatica* does not adopt the mode of fantasy writing but it is not a realist novel. Sampo's unusual predicament, Friari's errors of judgement and its consequences keep the novel in the realm of the improbable. A pertinent way of describing it would be "surreal", that is, suspended between the realistic and the improbable.

The genre of the novel is a productive lens for interpreting this text because it reminds us that *Grammatica* is a work of fiction. If we acknowledge this, it will become

easier to conceptualise it as an allegory with surreal elements. Furthermore, as Richard Rodriguez has argued in one of his autobiographical essays, the novel "is best capable of representing solitary existence set against a large social background" (1974/2004: 83). The novel generally focusses on a protagonist who acts against the background of recognisable social phenomena. It is, therefore, conducive to a reading that seeks to link Sampo's language learning experiences to extra-textual and empirically verifiable phenomena such as nation-building and essay-text literacy.

As far as the confession is concerned, this is foregrounded by Marani himself. At the outset, Friari explains that he decided to rewrite and publish Sampo's memoir because he is "tormentato dal rimorso" (10)[16] and because he considers himself responsible for Sampo's death: "[È] innegabile che fu il mio errore a portare alla perdizione l'autore di questo manoscritto [Sampo]" (11).[17] Friari's rewriting and publication of Sampo's manuscript are driven by a desire to demonstrate his good intentions and to atone for his mistakes (11, 199-200). As a genre, the confession is usually associated with autobiography and, by extension, non-fiction. The confession has played an important role in the establishment of autobiography as a genre and is now widely considered its precursor (Saldívar 1985: 28; Marcus 1994: 2; Anderson 2006: 18)

Some of the logics of the confession are, nevertheless, applicable to a fictional text such as *Grammatica.* As explained in Chapter 2, Foucault has discussed the characteristics of nineteenth-century oral confessions about sexuality elicited for clinical purposes (1976/1998). He has argued that the confession is a two-way social discourse in which the truth is never revealed in an unmediated way. According to Foucault, "the revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said" (1976/1998: 66). A confession, in other words, involves a confessant who is not aware of the whole truth and a confessor who pieces the truth together by applying his beliefs/theories to the confession (Foucault 1976/1998: 66). The truth, therefore, is dependent not only on what the confessant reveals but also on the theories and beliefs that the confessor adopts. If we apply Foucault's ideas to

[16] Plagued with remorse. (10)
[17] [T]here is no denying that it was my error which led the author of this manuscript to his tragic end. (10)

Grammatica, Friari can be envisaged as the confessant, the reader/critic as the confessor, while Friari's memoir becomes a text that requires careful analysis. From this it follows that a text like *Grammatica* is more complex than it seems. Although it lends itself to being read as an original story about well-known topics, such as language and identity, there is much more that can be deciphered and discussed.

Henry Staten has expressed similar ideas about *literary* confessions. He has argued that the confession (understood as a text about someone's wrongdoings) is a manipulative genre. The confessor "weaves a continuous self-inculpation into the text" which forestalls inculpation "from the outside [from the confessor/critic]" (Staten 1998: 112). Since, in a confession, the confessant overtly sets out to explain his "sins", the critic may be less likely to challenge the text, to highlight inconsistencies and lies, which would result in a reductive interpretation. When mapped out onto *Grammatica,* this suggests that we should analyse it carefully and, more importantly, that we should approach Friari with scepticism, as an unreliable narrator who is blind to certain aspects of the events he chronicles in his narrative.

In this section, I have argued that *Grammatica* is informed by the logics of the literacy narrative, the allegory, the novel, and the confession. Each logic predisposes us to approach the text in a different way. The literacy narrative has us focus on representations of language acquisition and literacy. The novel has a focus on the main character, the setting in which s/he acts and on links with recognisable extra-textual contexts. The allegory asks us to look for a covert narrative and to interpret characters, settings, places and events as metaphors and metonymies which point to these very contexts. The confession urges us to be sceptical of what the confessant/Friari tells us and to approach *Grammatica* as a very complex text. Although they are different, these genres can support the view that *Grammatica* is an allegorical rendition of the historical processes that caused "essay-text literacy" (a literacy practice based on standard language, the norms of grammar, print and the writing of prose) to gain ascendancy over other literacy practices. In the next section, I illustrate the historical events on which Marani draws to write *Grammatica.* I argue that Marani builds on Benedict Anderson's study of nationalism *Imagined Communities* (1983/2016) and his concept of "print-capitalism".

3.4 Imagined Communities: setting the scene for an allegorical novel about essay-text literacy and nationalism

Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (1983/2016) is an influential comparative study of nationalism in America, Europe, Africa, and Asia by the historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson. As Daniel Druckman points out, nationalism is a complex "political, economic, and sociological phenomenon" (1994: 44) and it can take on different meanings depending on the standpoint we adopt to analyse it. Anderson's standpoint can be defined as "social psychological" (Druckman 1994: 44) since, in his study, nationalism stands for "feelings of attachment" and "sense of loyalty" towards one's nation of origin (Druckman 1994: 44). As Rossalina Latcheva (2010) argues, there are different degrees of attachment to one's nation and she distinguishes between "nationalism" and "patriotism". Latcheva defines "nationalism" as "blind support for the nation and feeling of national superiority" which "correlates positively with chauvinistic views and with derogation of out-groups" (2010: 192). "Patriotism" is described as "critical loyalty towards the in-group (nation)" which "does not correlate or correlates negatively with ethnic exclusion" (2010: 192). "Nationalism", in other words, can be viewed as a more exclusionary and radical form of patriotism.

In his book, Anderson does not draw such firm distinctions and uses "nationalism" to mean both "critical loyalty towards the nation" and "blind support for it". Anderson's main goal is to understand how human beings develop attachment to the nation, regardless of the shape that this may take. Anderson argues that nations are not an inevitability but "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983/2016: 4-7), that is, human inventions that originate from "a radically changed form of consciousness" (Anderson 1983/2016: xiv). Nation-states form when humans start to imagine a community of which they are part (the nation-state) even though they will never be in contact with, or know, all the members of that community. Nation-states and nationalism depend on human perception and a process of identity formation that acknowledges the nation. In his study, Anderson seeks to understand how this takes place.

Anderson argues that "imagined communities" embed themselves in the consciousness of their citizens via a series of cultural strategies and artefacts that transform the imagined community into an ontology to which one can become attached. According to Anderson, the strategies that can reify the nation and shape individual consciousness include maps, censuses, museums (1983/2016: 163-186), citizenship, national flags, anthems (1983/2016: 81), national languages and "print-capitalism" (Anderson 1983/2016: 67-82; Warner 1990: 63). "Print-capitalism" refers to the publication of dictionaries, grammars, epic literature, and newspapers that accompanied nineteenth-century nationalist movements (1983/2016: 70-72). Print-capitalism contributed to the formation of imagined communities because it enabled certain vernaculars to be standardised and to achieve the status of national languages. Print-capitalism, in other words, helped to create one of the most powerful signifiers of the nation-state, language.

Anderson associates print-capitalism with nineteenth-century nationalist movements because many of their leaders were language experts – "lexicographers, philologists, grammarians, folklorists, publicists" (Anderson 1983/2016: 75) – who sought to establish a national language through the standardisation of their own vernacular, namely, the vernacular of middle-class culture. Grammars, dictionaries, epics, and newspapers were the tools which enabled them to achieve their goals. Grammars and dictionaries made explicit the linguistic rules and orthography to be used, thus creating a standard version of the vernacular. Epics and newspapers were written in standard language and thus made this language variety known to the wider public. Furthermore, they told stories about the nation's past (epics) and current affairs (newspapers), which contributed to reifying the nation itself in people's consciousness. National consciousness emerged because the print vernacular "was not just archived for official record and scholarship but also widely available in the form of print commodities" (Collins and Blot 2009: 71-72).

According to Anderson, nineteenth-century Finland well illustrates these dynamics. In Finland, nationalism was propelled forward by "persons whose profession largely consisted of the handling of language: writers, teachers, pastors and lawyers" (Hugh-Watson in Anderson 1983/2016: 74). By the 1820s, "[t]he study of folklore and the rediscovery and piecing together of popular epic poetry went

together with the publication of grammars and dictionaries, and led to the appearance of periodicals which served to standardize Finnish" (Hugh-Watson in Anderson 1983/2016: 74). The example of Finland substantiates the idea that the creation of a national language and, by extension, of the nation was the result of an interplay between linguists, nationalism, print objects, and linguistic standardisation.

Anderson is also keen to stress the interplay between linguists and the capitalist market:

> It is self-evident that all the lexicographers, philologists, grammarians, folklorists, publicists and composers did not carry on their revolutionary activities in a vacuum. They were, after all, producers for the print-market, and, they were linked, via that silent bazaar, to consuming publics. (Anderson 1983/2016: 75)

To establish a standard vernacular which could achieve the status of national language, nationalists needed the printing press, since, through mechanical reproduction, it was easier to replicate the same version of a language and to produce affordable print material for the wider public (Febvre and Martin in Anderson 1983/2016: 44). But the reverse is also true. Printers needed nationalists and their ideas to make profit: print in the vernacular both responded to, and stimulated, a growing demand for dictionaries, grammars, newspapers, and the like. Print is "one of the first fully capitalized commodities" (Kramnick 2004: 6). Hence the hyphenated "print-capitalism" used by Anderson.

Anderson emphasises the causal link between the "silent bazaar" of the printing press, capitalism, and nineteenth-century nationalism because he wants to challenge studies of print that divorce print from capitalism, treating it as the "genius of modern history" (Anderson 1983/2016: 44). For Anderson, print cannot by itself cause any momentous changes in society. Put differently, print does not emanate an essence which changes human beings and their consciousness. Changes originate from the interaction of larger sociohistorical dynamics. Anderson aptly reminds us that "although printing was invented first in China, possibly 500 years before its

appearance in Europe [*c.*1450], it had no major […] impact precisely because of the absence of capitalism there" (1983/2016: 44*n*).

Anderson can be said to echo concepts expressed by NLS (New Literacy Studies) scholars regarding literacy. Street, for instance, theorised the "ideological model" of literacy as a reaction against the "autonomous model" of literacy (1984: 95-129; 1993: 7-10), that is, theoretical frameworks that underpin great divide theories and that assume that literacy has unmediated and transformative powers regardless of the context in which it is used. Similarly, Graff has argued that literacy's impact is never linear but mediated by a variety of factors (e.g. ethnicity, race, sex, geography, class) and, therefore, discontinuous and discrete in its effects (Graff 2013: 75).

Alongside the role of capitalism, Anderson highlights the role of social class. He argues that print-capitalism was mainly an upper- and middle-class affair due to the uneven distribution of literacy among the population:

> If we note that as late as 1840, even in Britain and France, the most advanced states in Europe, almost half the population was illiterate (and in backward Russia almost 98 per cent), 'reading classes' meant people of some power. More concretely, they were, in addition to the old ruling classes of nobilities and landed gentries, courtiers and ecclesiastics, rising middle strata of plebeian lower officials, professionals, and commercial and industrial bourgeoisies. (Anderson 1983/2016: 76)

The correlation between print-capitalism and class outlined here implies that the lower classes may not have been influenced by print-capitalism and, consequently, that their consciousness was less likely to identify with the "imagined community" of the nation-state. This undermines the main thesis of *Imagined Communities*. When Anderson argues that the nation-state is an invention which can achieve the status of ontology, he does not make any distinctions of class. How can we, then, position the lower classes within the dynamics of print-capitalism and of the imagined community?

Anderson does not overtly address this issue. However, we can infer that the lower classes were impacted by the interplay between print-capitalism and schooling.

The classroom used the publications of print-capitalism as teaching aids: "Monolingual dictionaries were vast compendia of each language's print-treasury, portable (if sometimes barely so) from shop to *school*, office to residence" (Anderson 1983/2016: 71, my italics). Moreover, in the nineteenth century, emergent nation-states organised literacy campaigns aimed at the masses and based on centralised education systems. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that schooling was the main means through which the lower classes came into direct contact with print-capitalism and its consciousness-changing effects.

Schools and education systems could also inculcate nationalist ideas in learners from *all* social strata. In the introduction to the collection of essays *National Literacy Campaigns*, Robert Arnove and Harvey Graff argue that "[h]istorically, large-scale efforts to provide literacy […] have been more closely related to efforts of centralizing authorities to establish a moral or political consensus, and over the past two hundred years, to nation-state building" (1987: 2). Véronique Bénéï, in *Manufacturing Citizenship: Education and Nationalism in Europe, South Asia and China* (2005), makes a similar point:

> Pedagogical missions lay at the very core of modernity projects both in 'Western' and 'non-Western' situations. Governments […] particularly envisaged pedagogical missions as crucial tools for safeguarding the viability of the state by producing "responsible citizens". Hence the formal educational projects concocted in the nineteenth century by state officials and administration. (2005: 10)

The main goal of education systems was (and still is) to establish a shared moral consensus regarding the viability of the nation. This can take various shapes. From textbooks produced by the government which depict a neighbouring country as a dangerous enemy (e.g. Mohammed-Arif 2005: 147-148) to what Graff calls the "moral basis of literacy", that is, the inculcation of traits such as obedience, deference and punctuality to preserve the social order and to create a docile workforce (Graff 1979: 24-25; Gee 1987: 204-205; Graff 1987: 288).

Anderson alludes to the tight relation between nationalism, literacy campaigns and the education system when he quotes historian Eric Hobsbawn's dictum that "the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities became its most conscious champions" (in Anderson 1983/2016: 71). However, Anderson's main focus is on what Young calls the "extracurricular sites of education" (2004: 13), that is, settings and contexts which are different from the classroom and in which people learn language and literacy without formal instruction by a teacher. Reading a national epic and consulting a dictionary in one's home are examples of extracurricular sites of education because the reader is exposed to the language of print-capitalism and its cultural valance without explicit teaching about it.[18]

If we approach *Imagined Communities* from the standpoint of literacy, Anderson's discussion of print-capitalism can be said to describe the origins of "essay-text literacy", a practice linked to the middle class and institutionalised schooling. Anderson highlights an important aspect of this practice, namely, the extent to which it spread not only via the education system but also via the "extracurricular sites of education" – situations and contexts in which we acquire language without conscious and overt teachings. Anderson suggests that consulting a grammar book and reading an epic poem about the origin of a nation is a form of literacy education and, more precisely, of apprenticeship in essay-text literacy.

Although *Imagined Communities* is a contribution to political science and social history, it provides evocative scenarios which lend themselves to being reformulated though imagination and the lens of literacy and language acquisition. Anderson does not provide comprehensive case studies but a series of anecdotes about how various nation-states became imagined communities. Further, the language that he uses is highly figurative. For example, he explains the impact of

[18] Young's concept of the "extracurricular sites of education" can be said to draw on Stephen Krashen's famous distinction between "acquisition" and "learning" (1981), two words that, in this thesis, are used interchangeably. According to Krashen, "acquisition" is a process whereby linguistic knowledge is achieved unconsciously and by socialisation in social groups. The way infants acquire their family language can be defined as "acquisition". "Learning" involves conscious knowledge gained through formal teaching. As James Paul Gee has pointed out, it is difficult to set firm boundaries between learning and acquisition: "Much of what we come by in life after our initial enculturation involves a mixture of acquisition and learning" (1990/2008: 170). The "extracurricular sites of education" are likely to involve more acquisition than learning but they do not rule out the latter.

dictionaries as follows: “One can thus trace this lexicographic revolution as one might the ascending roar in an arsenal alight, as each small explosion ignites others, till the final blaze turns night into day” (1983/2016: 72). What is striking about this statement is that it not anchored in empirically verifiable facts. Instead, it renders the “lexicographic revolution” rhetorically, through evocative language and an extended simile suggestive of warfare, unstoppable energy, and speed. The style of *Imagined Communities* has something in common with that of literature. Most importantly, determining the consciousness-changing power of the print-capitalism is remarkably resistant to the kind of historical analysis that Anderson carries out. Anderson’s discussion of print-capitalism sets the distant past (the nineteenth century) as its reference point: How can we be sure that people’s consciousness was changed by national epics, dictionaries and grammars? And if it was indeed changed, how exactly was it altered? Was it a liberating experience or a traumatic one? What role did orality and other semiotic modes played? Were they completely ousted by essay-text literacy and print-capitalism, or did they continue to inform people’s lives and identity?

Marani is familiar with Anderson’s study. In his articles and lectures, he has endorsed the idea of imagined communities, of the constructedness of the nation-state (Marani 2004: n.p; in Kirkham 2012: 4’ 39”; Marani 2012: 17’ 44”). He has also coined his own term – “the apparatus of state ideology” – to refer to the strategies used by state institutions to reify the nation (flags, geographical borders, national languages) (Marani 2012: 17’ 44”). Furthermore, in *Imagined Communities*, Anderson describes Finland as a microcosm of the dynamics that brought about the spread of essay-text literacy. Could it be that *Grammatica* reformulates through fiction the anecdotes that Anderson sketches and the questions that he raises regarding essay-text literacy and language acquisition?

The remainder of this chapter is a reading of *Grammatica* which takes seriously the influence of *Imagined Communities* and its anecdotes about literacy and language acquisition. By using the literacy narrative approach and its tools, I argue that the novel is an allegorical rendition of the historical processes that have enabled essay-text literacy to establish itself as a dominant literacy practice. In line with the logic of the allegory, the characters and events described are treated as metaphors and metonymies alluding to extra-textual phenomenon. Sampo stands for the citizens

of the nation-state who are socialised in essay-text literacy and for the effects that this has on their identity formation; Friari and Koskela are interpreted as mouthpieces for nationalism and its relation with the education system and essay-text literacy. Koivisto represents an alternative literacy practice based on group singing, music and transnationalism which is more conducive to identity formation than essay-text literacy; Sampo's death is an indictment of nationalism and its ideological apparatus; Friari's rewriting of Sampo's memoir stands for the dominance of essay-text literacy and the loss of valuable semiotic resources originating from alternative literacy practices.

3.5 The letter kills, singing gives life

To navigate literacy narratives, the literacy narrative approach uses three tools: the competing logics of the literacy narrative, the regionalising of literacy and the operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy. Not all its tools need to be used at the same time in any one analysis. However, they provide the critic with useful points of discussion and they can help pin down the meaning that literacy and language acquisition have in the text. So far in this chapter, I have used the competing logics to tease out the genres that are applicable to *Grammatica*. I will now look at the operating metaphors used for Friari's characterisation as a way into the text. I use this tool because teachers of literacy play a major role in *Grammatica*. There are three of them (Friari, Koskela, Koivisto) and they are the means through which Sampo tries to rebuild his identity. Moreover, metaphors are an intrinsic component of the text since *Grammatica* is an allegory. I begin with Friari because he is both the implied author of *Grammatica* and a confessant. As the implied author, he has much leverage on the narrative; as a confessant, he requires careful analysis. Friari plays such an important role that any interpretation of this text must hinge on an understanding of him as a character.

Two days before Sampo leaves Trieste for Finland, Friari launches into a monologue full of advice for the young man:

> "Deve tornare nei luoghi del suo passato. Solo là può sperare di trovare qualcosa che risvegli la sua memoria. A volte basta un odore, una luce, un rumore che ha sentito mille volte senza accorgersene e che d'improvviso puo' scatenare il ricordo." (35)[19]
>
> "Si metta a imparare la sua lingua. Questo più di ogni altra cosa potrà aiutare la sua memoria. Un soffio basta, se sotto la cenere cova ancora il minimo fuoco." (35)[20]
>
> "Vedrà non sarà difficile. Ma dovrà sforzarsi. Non potrà accontentarsi di qualche parola e qualche gesto come abbiamo fatto tra noi in queste settimane. Dovrà studiarla, la sua lingua, ma non solo. Il finlandese è la lingua in cui è stato allevato, la lingua della ninnananna che ogni sera la faceva addormentare. Dovrà amarla oltre che studiarla." (35) [21]
>
> "Ancora un consiglio," disse. "Da uomo, non da medico. Siccome la lingua è madre, si cerchi una donna. Dalla donna veniamo a questo mondo, dalla madre impariamo a parlare." (35-36)[22]

Gola, in "Grammatica dell'esilio" (2002), deems this scene to be "il momento più sereno del romanzo" (the most serene moment of the novel) and argues that the

[19] "You must go back to your past life. Only there can you hope to find something that will jog your memory. Sometimes all it takes is some smell, some trick of the light, some sound that you have heard a thousand times, however unknowingly." (32)

[20] "Now you must start to learn your language. This above all will help your memory. The merest breath is enough if there is still any fire at all underneath the ashes." (32)

[21] "You'll see, it won't be difficult. But you will have to make an effort. You won't be able to make do with just a few words and the odd gesture, as we have done in the past few weeks. You will have to work hard at your language. Finnish is the language in which you were brought up, the language of the lullaby that sent you to sleep each night. Apart from studying it, you must learn to love it." (32-33)

[22] "One more bit of advice," he said. "I speak now as a man, not as a doctor. Since language is our mother, try and find yourself a woman. It is from a woman that we come into this world, from a mother that we learn to speak." (33)

doctor speaks “come un padre parla al proprio figlio adolescente” (just as a father would talk to his teenage son) (2002: 360). Friari, in Gola’s view, acts a benevolent father figure who explains to Sampo a very important truth: that one’s identity in inextricably linked to one’s mother tongue because we are socialised into language from the moment we are born.

Friari’s last piece of advice, however, disrupts any serenity that this scene may convey. Friari tells Sampo to find himself a woman because this will make learning Finnish easier. Friari gives this advice because the expression “lingua madre”/“mother tongue” is a gendered metaphor which means “first language”. One’s first language is rhetorically connected to women and the female gender because a newborn is more likely to hear language from her/his mother first. Therefore, Friari concludes that if Sampo finds a woman, he will automatically find his first language, his mother tongue. Friari’s reasoning is so syllogistical that it makes us question his mental sanity.[23]

Throughout *Grammatica*, Marani scatters clues that point to derangement. Friari describes himself as a “scienziato” (scientist) (161) who tends to rely on rational thought even in contexts that require an empathetic and emotive approach. In one of his authorial intrusions, he describes a love letter that he wrote during his youth as follows: “[A]nche in questo mi comportavo da scienziato: descrivevo i miei stati d’animo come avrei descritto i sintomi e il decorso di una malattia” (161).[24] Friari’s lack of empathy becomes clear if we consider the “therapy” that he uses to treat Sampo’s aphasia and amnesia. Although Sampo has not fully recovered, Friari has him undertake a long journey through war-torn Europe. Sampo is still very vulnerable but the neurologist, notwithstanding his expertise, does not seem to understand this.

Marani foregrounds Sampo’s vulnerability by associating him with the metaphor of the infant/newborn. When Sampo describes his awakening from his coma, he tells us that he felt enveloped by “un liquido denso, che rallentava i movimenti e soffocava i rumori” (13).[25] As Sabina Gola has noted, this is an allusion to

[23] Friari’s alignment of women with procreation and the upbringing of children also reflects rigid patriarchal views. As we shall see, essay-text literacy, the literacy practice associated with Friari, has developed via male education and schooling.

[24] In fact, here too I was behaving like a scientist: I described my state of mind just as I would have the symptoms and course of a disease. (146)

[25] A dense liquid, which slowed down movement and deadened sound. (13)

amniotic fluid while the ship on which Sampo find himself stands for the maternal womb (2002: 360). The metaphor of the newborn is also embedded in the word "aphasic" (unable to speak). This word is connected to the word "infant" through etymology. "Infant" derives from the Latin *īnfāns* which means "unable to speak" and, therefore, aphasic.

Friari's "therapy" is so inappropriate that it suggests that Friari may be more a dangerous lunatic than a benevolent father. If we consider that the doctor describes himself as a "scienziato" (scientist), the operating metaphor that emerges is that of the "mad scientist". This metaphor is fitting because Friari is reminiscent of a scientist from literature who could also be viewed as "mad", namely, Viktor Frankenstein. Frankenstein turns to alchemy and the "exploded systems" of Agrippa and Paracelsus (Shelley 1818/1996: 21) to create a monster whom he cannot control and who torments him. Likewise, Friari takes it upon himself to rebuild Sampo's identity but the chain of events that this triggers leads to Sampo's suicide, which torments the doctor with guilt and remorse.

Another operating metaphor is that of the nationalist. As discussed earlier, a nationalist is someone who endorses nationalism. Nationalism can be viewed as a radical form of patriotism. A nationalist, therefore, is someone who considers their country of origin as superior to other countries and who supports the nation-state and its initiatives (e.g. wars, immigration policies, identity markers) regardless of the benefits for citizens. Friari can be described as a nationalist because he teaches Sampo to frame an understanding of himself exclusively in relation to the Finnish nation.

To help Sampo recover a sense of identity, Friari resorts to some of the strategies that, according to Anderson, are used by nation-states to reify the nation in the consciousness of its citizens, that is, maps, flags and geographical borders:

> Una mattina il dottore aprì sul tavolo una carta d'Europa e con un cenno della mano, mi invitò a fare qualcosa che non capivo. Credetti che si trattasse di un nuovo esercizio [di finlandese] e allora mi applicai a osservare le chiazze verdi e

marrone, i contorni frastagliati del mare blu, le rughe profonde dei fiumi. (16)[26]

Per incoraggiarmi, il dottore puntò l'indice su una tozza striscia verde tutta traforata di azzurro. Io fissavo i suoi occhi e poi la carta, aggrottando le ciglia sempre più confuso. Poi capii. Ma certo, il dottore voleva che gli indicassi da dove venivo. […]. Riconoscevo le forme scavate sulla carta dalle cicatrici rosse delle frontiere, ma non sapevo più cosa fossero. Le lettere maiuscole che attraversavano valli e montagne non mi dicevano nulla. Francia, Germania, Austria, Ungheria, Romania vagavano nella mia mente come contorni disegnati, che non sapevo più nominare. […] Girava e rigirava la carta insistendo con il dito sulla sagoma della Finlandia. Si lasciò sfuggire qualche parola, un'esclamazione che ripetè più volte. Per me solo suoni che percepivo ma non capivo. (17-18)[27]

Nel flusso degli avvenimenti che il dottore mi sottoponeva con l'aiuto di fotografie, mappe o bandiere tratte dai suoi libri, e che raccontavano la guerra in corso, non riuscivo a cogliere nessun elemento cui ancorare la mia identità. Lì tutto diventava confuso, scivolava dietro un vetro opaco. (22)[28]

[26] One morning Doctor Friari opened up a map of Europe on the table and gestured to me to do something I could not understand. I thought that it was some new [Finnish] exercise and set myself to observing the green and brown patches, the jagged indentations of the blue sea, the deep furrows of the rivers. (15)
[27] By way of encouragement, the doctor pointed a finger at a stumpy green strip fretworked with blue. I looked first at his eyes and then at the map, frowning in a state of growing confusion. Then at last I understood. Of course, the doctor wanted me to show him where I came from. […] I recognised the shapes carved out on the map by the red scars of the frontiers, but I no longer knew what they were. The capital letters straddling valleys and mountains meant nothing to me. France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania wandered around my mind as outlined shapes, but I could no longer put a name to them […]. [H]e turned the map this way and that, keeping his finger pointed towards the outline of Finland. He let slip the odd word, an exclamation he repeated several times: for me these were just sounds, which I could hear but not understand. (16-17)
[28] Of the flow of events that the doctor put before me with the help of photographs, maps and flags taken from books, none served as anchor for my identity. Here everything became a blur, slipping away as though shut off by clouded glass. (21)

Sampo cannot remember anything about his past and cannot tell the difference between sounds and spoken words. His mind and his consciousness can be compared to a *tabula rasa* ready to be filled with words, concepts, memories, experiences, and images. Friari fills them with the image of different nations, their flags, and borders and encourages Sampo to link his identity to Finland.

Friari also assigns Sampo one of the most potent signifiers of the nation-state, that is, language. As soon as Sampo awakens from his coma, he starts to teach him Finnish (16). Finnish is not an obvious choice and is indexical of a radical form of nationalism. Since 1863, Finland has had two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Swedish speakers are a minority and, at present, represent only around 5.4% of the population (*NPLD – Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity*: 2017). Up until 1863, Swedish was the language of bureaucracy and higher education in Finland. The 1820 Finnish nationalist movement (which Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities*) started to promote Finnish as the language of state institutions and the people, which swept Swedish aside. Friari never considers the possibility that Sampo may have been a Swedish speaker and thus aligns himself with an exclusionary form of nationalism that marginalises language minorities and privileges dominant languages and linguistic practices.

At first, Friari only exposes Sampo to oral Finnish without expecting him to understand, or to respond: "Come seppi più tardi, fin da quei primi giorni, il dottore mi parlava in finlandese, la sua lingua, che credeva fosse anche la mia" (16).[29] As Sampo gains strength, Friari's teaching becomes more structured and complex. Friari sets him "esercizi di articolazione",[30] thanks to which Sampo learns to utter his first words, and exercises which involve reading and writing:

> [I]l dottore mi indicava un oggetto nel paesaggio del golfo e mi chiedeva di disegnarlo sul suo quaderno. Sotto ogni disegno il

[29] As I learned later, right from those early days, the doctor was speaking to me in Finnish, his own language, which he believed also to be my own. (15)
[30] Pronunciation exercises. (20)

> dottor Friari scriveva il suo nome e mi insegnava a pronunciarlo. Ripetevo questi suoni dapprima esitando, poi sempre con maggiore sicurezza. Diventavano parole mie, che sapevo riprodurre e leggere da solo e che col tempo imparai a comporre insieme. (20-22)[31]

For Friari, it is important that Sampo should become not only a language user but also a literate being. On the one hand, there is nothing extraordinary about this. Literacy teaching only consists of a few words and Sampo seems to get a sense of achievement from it. On the other, the operating metaphors for Friari are the mad scientist and the radical nationalist, which casts an ominous connotation on everything that the doctor does. Could his Finnish lessons be just the beginning of an apprenticeship in an extreme form of nationalism?

Historically, literacy has played a crucial role in nation-building. Nation-building, in turn, has a strong relation with schooling because, as Cook-Gumperz has put it, "to have schooling without literacy is not possible" (2006: 47). Furthermore, nation-building has used print material in the guise of "print-capitalism" and a literacy practice which I have referred to as "essay-text literacy" to shape people's consciousness so that the nation becomes an ontology which is part of one's identity. Literacy acquisition, therefore, lends itself to being portrayed as a vehicle for nationalism. The association between literacy, nation-building, schooling, essay-text literacy, and nationalism which is hinted at by Friari's characterisation and his operating metaphors becomes more explicit when Sampo is in Helsinki and the Lutheran Pastor Olof Koskela becomes his Finnish teacher. Marani achieves this by introducing numerous references to the classroom and print-capitalism. Sampo is defined as an "allievo" (pupil) (56, 79, 160), he studies grammar by means of a grammar book given to him by the pastor (55) and has a "quaderno" (school notebook) in which he writes his memoir and does the homework set by Koskela (9, 10, 49, 67).

[31] [T]he doctor would point to some object in the landscape of the bay and ask me to draw in his notebook. […]. Doctor Friari would write the name of each object underneath the drawing and teach me how to pronounce it. I repeated the sounds I heard him say, hesitantly at first, then with growing confidence. They were becoming my words; I could repeat and read them on my own, over time, I learned to put them together. (20-21)

The Italian word “quaderno” is a powerful signifier of schooling and education systems because it refers to a notebook especially designed for use in primary and secondary schools. A “quaderno” is either “a righe” (ruled) or “a quadretti” (with squares), it has colourful and illustrated covers, and it is saddle-stitched down the spine. A “quaderno” can be used for general notetaking and, say, shopping lists, but “bloc-notes”, and the more old-fashioned “taccuino” are normally used for this purpose. A “bloc notes” and a “taccuino” are also structurally different from a “quaderno” since their sheets are either perfect or spiral bound at the top. To retain the association with schooling, “quaderno” should be rendered in English as “exercise book” or “school notebook”.

Landry’s English translation of *Grammatica* overlooks the relation that “quaderno” has with schooling as it tends to render “quaderno” as “notebook”. The first time “quaderno” appears in the Italian original, it is followed by the adjective “scolastico” (9) (meant for school) and Landry translates it as “school notebook” (9). The second time it appears without the qualifier “scolastico” and Landry renders it as “exercise book” (10). Nevertheless, Landry is not consistent. Aside from these two instances, in her translation, “quaderno” is always “notebook” (e.g. 145, 165, 182). Her initial lexical choices appear to be more driven by a desire to avoid the loss of the adjective “scolastico” than by an awareness of the actual function of the word “quaderno”. Her choices may also have been influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s memoir *Quaderni del carcere* (1947/2001), which is translated as *Prison Notebooks* although Gramsci wrote it in “quaderni” meant for school. The association with schooling may not be relevant for Gramsci’s work but it is relevant for *Grammatica* since, through allegory, Marani attempts to render the historical processes that have caused essay-text literacy to become a dominant literacy practice.

Figure 3 Original manuscript of Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere*[32]

Regarding Koskela, we learn from Sampo's memoir that he had been a teacher before the war (56) and that he envisaged the sacristy where the Finnish lessons took place as his "accademia personale" (56).[33] Koskela's lessons are geared to essay-text literacy. They focus on reading and writing and standard, grammatically correct, Finnish. The school notebook which Sampo uses for notetaking (and for writing his memoir) contains "esercizi di flessione e di scomposizione sillabica dei sostantivi soggetti a gradazione vocalica " (65),[34] "aggettivi e verbi [che] si susseguono in un'arida sequenza di parole nude" (20),[35] "concentrati di grammatica dove su ogni riga sfilavano tre o quattro regole, l'una aggrovigliata nelle eccezioni dell'altra" (173).[36] Koskela also uses the output of print-capitalism. He equips Sampo with a grammar book (55) and teaches him to read and appreciate the *Kalevala* (54-55).

First published in 1835, the *Kalevala* is a work of epic poetry about Finland's ancient gods compiled by Elias Lönnrot, a doctor who had a degree in literature. Lönnrot was an active supporter of the "Fennoman movement" (the nineteenth-century Finnish nationalist movement which led to the dominance of Finnish over

[32] Source: Manzo (2019: n.p.)
[33] His own private educational establishment. (51)
[34] Exercises in inflection and breaking down into syllables of nouns subject to vowel-change. (59)
[35] Adjectives and verbs [that] follow one another in a succession of dry, bald words. (19)
[36] Elixirs of grammar whose every line contained three or four rules, one entangled in the exceptions of another. (157)

Swedish). In 1828, during a series of eleven field trips across Finland, the doctor collected Finnish oral folk tales and mythology which he recombined into a poem of around 23,000 lines titled *Kalevala* (Solsten and Meditz 1990: 17). The gods of the poem are represented as steadfast and skilled warriors who do battle to protect the people of Kalevala, a poetic name for Finland which means "land of heroes" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2015: n.p.). The gods themselves and their exploits were read as representing the origins of the Finnish nation and of the Finns themselves. The *Kalevala* helped the Finnish reading public envisage a common origin for their newly-formed "imagined community" and gave increased impetus to the creation of standard Finnish.

Koskela takes the relation between the Finns and the *Kalevala* as a supporter of the "Fennoman movement" would. He makes Sampo's identity as a Finn dependent on it and he instructs him to read and study the book:

> Quando potrai leggere il *Kalevala* sarai un vero finlandese, quando a sentire il ritmo dei suoi canti ti si accaponerà la pelle, allora sarai davvero uno dei nostri. Guarda!" aggiunse aprendo sul tavolo il volume rilegato in pelle nera. "Queste non sono parole. Questa è cosmogonia rivelata, è la matematica che sostiene il creato!" (77)[37]

The *Kalevala* can supply Sampo with an identity as a Finn because, for Koskela, it is not a fictional representation of reality mediated by writing and print but the truth about the origin of the Finnish nation.

Koskela extends his faith in the referentiality of the *Kalevala* to the language in which the *Kalevala* is written. Koskela has a profound anti-Saussurean conceptualisation of Finnish. In Saussurean semiotics, words (the signs that make up language) are arbitrary conjunctions of form and meaning, arbitrary conflations of

[37] When you can read the *Kalevala* you will be a real Finn; when you can feel the rhythm of its songs, your hair will stand on end and you will be truly one of us! Look!" he added, opening the black leather-bound volume on the table, "These are not just words! This is revealed cosmogony, the mathematics that holds the created world in place! (70)

signifiers and signifieds. In this framework, the meaning of words and their signifiers are regulated by shared conventions. Conversely, Koskela co-opts biology and teaches Sampo that Finnish signifiers emanate directly from the objects and reality that they denote:

> [L]e altre lingue sono solo impalcature provvisorie del significato. Il finlandese no, non è stato inventato. I suoni della nostra lingua erano attorno a noi, nella natura, nel bosco, nella risacca del mare, nel verso degli animali, nel rumore della neve che cade. Noi li abbiamo solo raccolti e pronunciati. Quando Dio ha creato l'uomo, non si è curato di mandarne fin quassù di uomini. E così noi abbiamo dovuto arrangiarci a uscire da soli dalla materia inerme. Noi abbiamo sofferto per diventare vivi. […]. Diventare uomini da soli non è stato uno scherzo. Il finlandese è una lingua massiccia, un po' bombata sui lati, con sottili tagli al posto degli occhi e così son fatte le case di Helsinki, i visi della nostra gente. È una lingua dai suoni dolciastri e molli come la carne del pesce persico e della trota che si cuoce nelle sere d'estate […]. (59)[38]

Koskela suggests that Finnish is unique in its capability for referentiality and that this makes it superior to other languages. Moreover, he suggests that Finnish contains and reflects the unique essence and character of the Finns. The pastor, following the descriptions of the gods in the *Kalevala*, defines the Finns as resilient and independent and claims that the Finnish language reflects these qualities.

[38] Other languages are merely temporary scaffolding for meaning. Not so for Finnish: Finnish was not invented. The sounds of our languages were around us, in nature, in the woods, in the pull of the sea, in the call of the wild, in the sound of the falling snow. All we did was to bring them together and bend them to our needs. When God created man, he did not bother to send any man up here. So we had to do what we could to struggle free of defenceless matter on our own. In order to gain life, we had to suffer. […]. Becoming human all on our own was no joke. Finnish is a solid language, slightly rounded at the sides, with narrow slits for eyes, like the houses in Helsinki the faces of our people. It is language whose sounds are sweetish and soft, like the flesh of the perch and trout we cook on summer evening. (53)

Koskela's linguistic theories can be interpreted as a rendition of the "genius of language", the theory that binds one language to one nation. The genius of language posits that a national language expresses the unique character of its people and that, for this reason, it is the nation made manifest. In *Irresistible Signs*: *The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (2012), Paola Gambarota charts the origin of this theory. Contemporary scholars usually trace it to German Romanticism and to the rise of nationalist movements in Germany and Eastern Europe in the early nineteenth century. Gambarota, however, argues that the genius predates the German Romantics. It originated in the seventeenth century from the so-called "Orsi-Bouhours controversy", a series of exchanges between Italian and French intellectuals which traced the grammatical, syntactical, and phonetic peculiarities of their languages to climate and national character. Gambarota argues that the genius of language has served nationalist and absolutist policies (Gambarota 2012: 228) and that it undergirded the anti-Semitic works of Nazi linguists (Gambarota 2012: 7). The genius of language can become a fertile ground for extreme forms of nationalism. In *Grammatica*, the genius of language is connected to extreme nationalism because Koskela's lessons take place against the backdrop of the Second World War in Europe and because Finland was one of Germany's allies during the war (Germany helped to push back the Russians). Due to this web of associations, Koskela reminds us of the dictators of the Second World War (e.g. Hitler, Mussolini). Consequently, the operating metaphor that characterises him can be defined as that of the deranged nationalist.

In Sampo's own memoir, there is a tension between describing Koskela as a deranged nationalist and describing him as an eccentric and harmless patriot whom we should not take seriously: "[Koskela] stabiliva i più azzardati collegamenti, svelandomi trame segrete e intrighi pittoreschi che io, senza saperne nulla, instintivamente sentivo di non dover prendere sul serio" (56).[39] At the same time, Sampo senses that Koskela's language lessons are an initiation into a dangerous world-view and he also defines them as "investigazioni spregiudicate sulle lingue e sui popoli" (63).[40] Furthermore, both the pastor and Sampo often get drunk on *koskenkorva*

[39] He would make the most far-fetched connections, unveiling secrets plots and colourful intrigues which I, while knowing nothing about them, instinctively felt I should not take seriously. (50)
[40] Some almost dangerously liberal analysis of languages and people. (57)

during the lessons (54-55) and, as Sampo will later discover, Koskela is also addicted to hallucinogenic drugs (112). This makes Sampo question Koskela's integrity: "Non era più un uomo quell'essere seduto nella stanza spoglia. […]. La sua forza di spirito, che era stata per me luce e conforto, quel giorno mi apparve come un'esaltazione chimica che valeva le mie sbornie di koskenkorva. Ma il sentimento durò poco." (113).[41]

In Friari's authorial intrusions there is no such tension. The question of Koskela's theories and of his integrity is bypassed altogether. The doctor finds the pastor's disquisitions on Finnish moving and touching : "Mai prima d'ora ho sentito descrivere con tanto affetto e tanta efficacia la mia lingua" (57).[42] Nevertheless, there is grounds for arguing that Sampo's doubts about Koskela are more reliable than Friari's. Friari is a confessant, someone who only tells a partial truth; he is also a mad scientist, and a nationalist with extreme leanings himself. He is very similar to Koskela and he is unlikely to be able to give an objective appraisal of the pastor. We can therefore conclude that Koskela is more a deranged nationalist than a harmless patriot.

Another metaphor that structures Koskela's characterisation is that of the indoctrinator. This metaphor can be inferred from Koskela's own elucubrations about Finnish and the Finns but also from the religious denomination to which he belongs. Koskela is a Lutheran. Lutheranism is founded on the theology of Martin Luther whose central axiom is that believers ought to read the Scriptures for themselves, without the intercession of a priest. Putting this into practice resulted in an unprecedented effort to educate all strata of society, including the children of the lower classes (Gawthrop 1987: 31). On the one hand, this can be considered as a laudable emancipatory act. On the other, Luther kept a tight control over what was learned. In 1529, he created a pedagogical guide called the "Small Catechism". The Small Catechism instructed parish sextons "to gather the children at least once a week to teach them the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and some German hymns" (Helmreich in Gawthrop 1987: 32). Paradoxically, the teaching method was oral, consisting of

[41] The being seated in that sparsely furnished room was no longer a man […].His strength of spirit, which had brought support and comfort, appeared to me now merely as some chemically-produced elation, on a par with my own *koskenkorva*-fuelled drunkenness. But this feeling was short-lived. (102)
[42] Never have I heard Finnish described so affectionately, so forcefully. (51)

recitation and memorisation (Gawthrop 1987: 33). Reading instruction came in later (by 1541) but it was based on the Small Catechism and did not include writing instruction. The Small Catechism, recitation and memorisation ensured that the learners complied with the perspective of Luther himself and that dissent was kept at bay. By making Koskela a Lutheran, Marani suggests that his main aim is to manipulate Sampo to achieve his own nationalistic goals rather than help him find his true identity.

To summarise this section thus far, Friari's and Koskela's Finnish lessons are geared to the acquisition of essay-text literacy. They focus on reading, writing, the acquisition of standard and grammatically correct Finnish and they involve the study of the publications of print-capitalism (grammar books and national epics). There are four metaphors for the teaching of literacy, two for each teacher. Friari is characterised as a mad scientist and a nationalist who subscribes to a very narrow form of nationalism. Koskela can be viewed as an amplified version of Friari since he is characterised as a deranged nationalist and as an indoctrinator. These metaphors have much in common since they all point to notions of insanity, political extremism, and the will to manipulate minds. Furthermore, they are gendered. Not only are they associated with male characters, they are also reminiscent of famous fictional and non-fictional male figures, i.e. Frankenstein (mad scientist), Luther (indoctrinator), Hitler and Mussolini (deranged nationalists and indoctrinators).

This web of associations serves to highlight aspects of the development of essay-text literacy through history, some of which are discussed by Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. The teaching of standard Finnish via the publications of print-capitalism to build Sampo's identity as a Finn enacts the co-optation of literacy and schooling by nation-states. As we saw in the previous section about Anderson's study, nation-states have co-opted national (i.e. standard) languages, education systems and print material such as grammars, dictionaries, and epics to mould people's consciousness so that they identify more readily with the nation and are more willing to support it. Nationalism, which, following Latcheva, I have defined as "blind support for the nation", has been nurtured by essay-text literacy. Marani's association between essay-text literacy, extreme nationalism, and deranged indoctrinators reminds us of the dangers inherent in nationalism. Blind support for the nation can lead to intolerance of what is foreign and, as the dictatorships of the Second World War

suggest, to a systematic effort to physically eliminate it. Nationalism and the strategies used to nurture it (which include essay-text literacy) are a fertile ground for extremism, insanity and murder.

Marani makes the association between essay-text literacy, nationalism and insanity gendered because essay-text literacy has established itself as a literacy practice thanks to input from men. Rates of illiteracy have always been higher amongst women than men (Arnove and Graff 1987: 19; Bhola 1987: 255; Eklof 1987: 128; Van Holthoon 2009: 435). Up until the late nineteenth century, in France and England, if lower-class women received an education, this often stopped short of writing (Limage 1987: 295; Steedman 2009: 224). Furthermore, intensive apprenticeship in grammar was a feature of educational establishments reserved for males from elite families (Graff 1987: 26-27, 250, 256; Van Holthoon 2009: 435-436). Men have received more formal training in essay-text literacy than women. Essay-text literacy has reinforced patriarchy and patterns of female disenfranchisement. Hence, the gendering of nationalism and of the strategies used to foster it.

In *Grammatica,* there is nothing positive or liberating about essay-text literacy. Essay-text literacy is more likely to lead to the state than to a "state of grace". We can gather this from the metaphors linked to Sampo's teachers but also from the trajectory of Sampo's *angst* and the novel's ending. Friari's and Koskela's Finnish lessons do not have their desired effects. They do not help Sampo find his identity. If Friari had not clung to the belief that identity depends on the nation and its language, Sampo would have stayed in Trieste and he would have been more likely to have found out that he was an Italian soldier called Massimiliano Brodar. Moreover, when in Helsinki, Sampo's *angst* progressively worsens:

> Senza carri armati, senza bombardieri, ogni giorno mi sorprendeva su un fronte diverso. Mi attirava allo scoperto, lontano dai nascondigli della ragione, sul baratro di pensieri lugubri e vertiginosi. […]. Dopo tutti quei mesi, mi accorsi che ero solo come il primo giorno. L'angoscia che mi aveva

> schiacciato sul letto quel pomeriggio appena arrivato era ancora tutta dentro di me. (174-175)[43]

When Sampo discovers that "Sampo Karjalainen" is the name of a ship, his *angst* spirals out of control and he decides to enlist in the Finnish army. Sampo knows that he will die in battle, but this is what he seeks because death will provide him with an identity as a soldier who sacrificed himself for Finland. Sampo's incurable *angst* and death cast an ominous connotation on the identitarian strategies of the nation-state and suggest that other processes of identity formation are more desirable.

In *Grammatica*, Marani represents an alternative to essay-text literacy and to processes of identity formation that draw on nationalism and the nation-state. The alternative envisaged by Marani can be pieced together by analysing the fluctuations of Sampo's *angst*. Sampo's *angst* improves when he is in public places such as bars, hotels and churches. When, for instance, during the bombardments of Helsinki, he helps other Finns light bonfires to confuse Russian planes, his alienation disappears: "La fatica, il sudore, tutta la radura riempita di fiati bianchi, di corpi che lavoravano in silenzio, mi diedero una sensazione di pace, di concordia. Non ero solo, non ero più straniero. Era un sentimento forte" (72).[44] In Trieste, a noisy bar crowded with German and Italian soldiers dispels his loneliness and confusion:

> Fra militari tedeschi e camicie nere che si ubriacavano e cantavano, facevo durare piu' che potevo il mio bicchiere di birra e cantavo assieme ai miei sconosciuti compagni di sbronza canzoni che non capivo. Era rassicurante sentire la mia voce fondersi con quella degli altri, le mie parole sovrapporsi alle loro, uscire dalla mia bocca e prendere vita come se fossero davvero le mie, come se dietro a quei suoni che avevo imparato

[43] I had no tanks, no bombardiers, and each day surprised me on a different front, drawing me into the open, far from reason's hiding-places, towards a chasm of gloomy, giddy thoughts. […]. After all these months, I realized that I was alone as I had been on that first day. The anguish which had nailed me to the bed that first afternoon was still within me, entire and unabated. (158-159)

[44] The exhaustion, the sweat, that whole clearing swirling with the men's white breath, those bodies working in silence, all gave me a sense of peace, of harmony. I was no longer alone, no longer an outsider. It was a powerful feeling. (66)

> a imitare così bene ci fosse anche la coscienza del loro significato. (32)[45]

These two scenes can be defined as representations of the "extracurricular sites of education" (Young 2014: 13), that is, of contexts which promote language learning without formal instruction. Although there are neither grammar books nor reading or writing, Sampo still learns and processes language. Singing, music, and bodily gestures (the bodies of the Finns working together in silence, the soldiers singing together) facilitate comprehension and promote not only language production but also identity formation because Sampo no longer feels like an outsider.

Marani, here, can be said to outline a literacy practice which can be described as "sonic" because it is based on the semiotic modes of singing, music, sound, and on harmony between these and body language. In Marani's sonic literacy, knowledge of grammatical rules and of standard language are not important. Meaning is extracted from the "music"/sound of words and from the bodily gestures that accompany them. Another important aspect is its independence from questions of nationalism. Sonic literacy does not require identification with one's nation of origin and its national language. The community of the Trieste bar is, in fact, transnational. We know that it is made up of Germans and Italians. Trieste itself foregrounds transnationalism. Because of its liminal geographical position and a variegated history made of successive annexations to different territories, Trieste is a city which cannot fully be traced to any one nation-state. Friari describes it as "figlia di nessuno. Nè italiana, nè austriaca, nè slava […]." (41).[46]

It is Ilma Koivisto, the Finnish Red Cross nurse whom Sampo befriends in a hotel lobby in Helsinki, who has Sampo learn Finnish through sonic literacy. During a night out, Sampo asks her to teach him the lyrics of a Finnish military march so that he can write them down in his "quaderno" (92). But their language lessons do not

[45] Amidst German soldiers and Black Shirts who were getting drunk and singing, I would nurse my small glass of beer for as long as I dared, singing songs I could not understand along with my unknown drinking companions. It was reassuring to her my voice mingling with others, to hear my own words overlaying theirs, emerging from my mouth and springing into life as though they were truly my own, as though behind those sounds which I had learned to imitate so well. (29-30)

[46] A foundling city. Neither Italian, nor Austrian, nor Slav. (37)

limit themselves to reading and writing. Koivisto and Sampo sing the march while walking to its beat. Singing and walking in unison with Ilma temporarily dispels Sampo's *angst*: "Le nostre voci, irreali e sfacciate, andavano a sbattere contro i muri dei palazzi, ci ricadevano addosso in frantumi. Presto ebbi il fiato grosso, per la marcia, per il canto. Ma più cantavo, più la testa si svuotava" (97).[47] Kovisto also encourages Sampo to abandon his quest for an original identity linked to the Finnish nation. In a letter to Sampo which Friari has included in the rewriting, Koivisto explains that the solution to his predicament is to build up a "new memory":

> È proprio così irresistibile il richiamo che ti sospinge per strada a cercare tracce di te stesso? Non sarebbe più utile riempire con pazienza il tempo vero, quello che ti resta da vivere e giorno dopo giorno, un mattone per volta, ricostruirti una memoria nuova? (127) [48]

Since Ilma's advice may have saved Sampo and sonic literacy counteracts his *angst*, the operating metaphor that emerges is that of the "saviour". Significantly, as Ilma herself tells Sampo, her name means "libertà" (freedom) in Finnish (92).

Although sonic literacy is conducive to Sampo's identity formation and has the potential to save Sampo, it does not counterbalance the influence of essay-text literacy and nationalism. Sampo does not follow Ilma's advice but Koskela's teachings and example instead. Sampo's rejection of the nurse's advice can be interpreted as an acknowledgement, on Marani's part, of the dynamics of Bourdieu's "linguistic market" (Bourdieu 1982/1991: 54). According to Bourdieu, languages, literacy practices and people's "ways with words" are hierarchically structured. Some are more likely to be adhered to, and to be listened to, than others because they afford more symbolic and cultural capital.

[47] Disembodied and brazen, our voices were dashed against the walls, falling back upon us in fragments. What with the singing and the marching, I was soon out of breath; but the more I sang, the emptier my head became. (87-88)

[48] Is this compulsion to seek out traces of your past self really so strong? Would it not be more helpful to work patiently at filling real time – that time which is left to you – building up a new memory for yourself brick by brick, as one might put it? (117)

In the context of institutionalised language learning and schooling, Ilma's sonic literacy would be a deviant, unorthodox, literacy practice. Group singing accompanied by music and bodily gestures may be used for language acquisition at elementary level and in the "extracurricular sites of education". However, they are not the norm and they are unlikely to be endorsed by institutions. Conversely, essay-text literacy and its features (reading, writing, grammar, standard language, print) are well-established norms which command authority and which may also lead to professional success, to the "top of the ladder". Associating sonic literacy with a female teacher (Ilma) symbolises the different levels of power that these practices would have in real life. As noted earlier, women's access to literacy and education has always been more difficult than for men. Women have had fewer chances of being trained in dominant literacy practices. By the gendering sonic literacy, Marani suggests that, in real life, this practice would be classed as nondominant and unorthodox.[49]

Marani does not offer a representation of literacy practices where diversity triumphs: the dominant practice outdoes the nondominant one. At the same time, since sonic literacy has such a positive effect on Sampo and provides hope in an otherwise very sombre novel, its defeat can be framed as a deplorable loss. If we compare essay-text literacy to sonic literacy, the latter allows for gregariousness and communality while the former is linked to alienation and depression. But, more importantly, sonic literacy provides a wider range of semiotic modes to produce language and to make sense of language itself. Essay-text literacy only offers writing in standard and grammatically correct language. Sonic literacy is broader. It offers writing, singing, music and bodily gestures and fosters the affective dimension of language learning. The defeat of sonic literacy, therefore, points to a deplorable loss of semiotic resources for meaning-making, communication and identity formation.

The idea of a loss of semiotic resources is reinforced by Friari's rewriting of Sampo's memoir. As explained in section 3.1, Sampo's manuscript is not a coherent piece of prose. It is a collage of written words, cut-outs from the telephone directory, titles copied from newspapers, pencil drawings, grammar exercises and short

[49] Although the gendering of sonic literacy is historically grounded, it is also possible to say that Marani reinforces gender stereotypes which frame women as intellectually inferior to men.

autobiographical narratives in ungrammatical Finnish. Some of its sections are, for Friari, "impenetrabili" (20),[50] consisting of "aggettivi e verbi [che] si susseguono in un'arida sequenza di parole nude, senza nessuna sintassi, incollati come figure ritagliate"(20).[51] Other sections are more visual: "Queste pagine sono arricchite di disegni a matita, primitivi, ma molto elaborati e ricchi di particolari. […]. In uno è riconoscibile la chiesa del cortile. Altri descrivono scene del *Kalevala* ricopiate dalle illustrazioni del pastore Koskela" (57).[52]

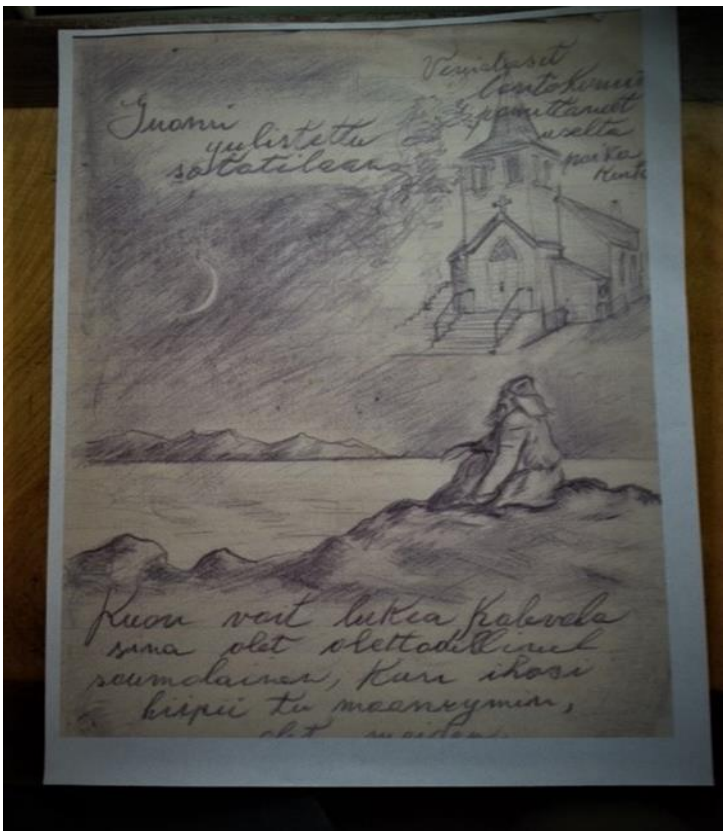


Figure 4 A reproduction of one of the pages of Sampo's memoir which shows a drawing of the church, an illustration from the *Kalevala*, a citation from Koskela's lessons and newspaper titles about the war (Image: Chiara Giussani)

[50] Impenetrable. (19)

[51] Adjectives and verbs [that] follow one another in a succession of dry, bald words without any grammatical structure, stuck there like cut-out shapes. (19)

[52] These pages also contain pencil drawings, unsophisticated, but extremely elaborate and detailed. […]. In one the church in the courtyard can be made out. […]. Ohers are scenes from the *Kalevala,* partly copied from the illustrations in Koskela's copy. (51)

Figure 4 is a reproduction of one of the pages of Sampo's memoir based on Friari's descriptions.[53] Although there is no coherent narrative, Sampo's manuscript brings together different semiotic modes: writing, images, colour (shades of black, white, grey). It is what social semiotician Gunther Kress would call a "multimodal text" (2003), that is, a text that mixes different semiotic modes. Friari's rewriting radically changes the manuscript by transforming it into a "monomodal" text exclusively made of coherent writing that adheres to the parameters of essay-text literacy. On the one hand, it is difficult to challenge Friari's rewriting strategies. If he had not rewritten the manuscript using standard language and coherent prose, we would not have been able to get to know Sampo's story. Although essay-text literacy has its roots in nationalism, it has resulted in the creation of a common code (standard language) which can facilitate mutual intelligibility, participation in the public sphere and, therefore, agency. On the other hand, semiotic modes are not interchangeable. As Kress has argued, each mode has particular "affordances" (Kress 2003: 12), that is, the potential to represent reality and express meaning in ways that are specific and unique to them.

Kress also maintains that the choice of semiotic modes is always "motivated" (2003/2010: 42), that is, always meaningful, never arbitrary nor neutral. A representation, "realises the interests, the perspectives, the positions and values of those who make the signs" (Kress 2003/2010: 44). For Kress, *any* attempt at representation is a "motivated sign" which, if contextualised, yields meaning. This applies even to representations made by "infants" like Sampo. Kress's concept of "motivated sign" stands in stark contrast to definitions of "sign" which draw from Saussure (1916/1974) and which we encountered earlier in this section (see also Section 1.3). According to Saussure, the meaning of a sign is arbitrary and established through shared convention. There is, in other words, no intrinsic correlation between the expression of a meaning and the form employed to express it.

From the standpoint of social semiotics, therefore, Sampo's manuscript has a precise meaning. More importantly, it tells a story which is different from Friari's rewriting and which cannot be recovered because essay-text literacy draws from

[53] Figure 4 is a pencil drawing by Chiara Giussani created in April 2019. I requested the drawing myself to provide a visual illustration of Sampo's memoir. The novel does not contain any illustrations.

fewer semiotic resources. What Friari deemed impenetrable was meaningful, a motivated sign which represented aspects of Sampo's life and which had probably been influenced by the semiotic resources of Ilma's sonic literacy. Some meaning could have been extracted from it. But this depended on the understanding of literacy practices other than essay-text literacy, which was beyond Friari's grasp.

The idea of loss of semiotic resources symbolised by the rewriting and sonic literacy suggests ambivalence regarding essay-text literacy. On the one hand, the novel can be read as an indictment of this literacy practice. Rooted in nationalism, essay-text literacy co-opts language to form identities which have the nation-state as their main building block and which can lead to extreme forms of intolerance. Furthermore, it is a largely monomodal literacy practice which limits the semiotic resources we can use for meaning-making, language production and identity formation. On the other hand, the novel suggests that essay-text literacy is a practice which can facilitate mutual comprehension, agency, and which affords symbolic and cultural capital. Essay-text literacy, in other words, cannot be easily replaced by other practices, notwithstanding its narrow purview and its roots. *Grammatica* does not provide clear-cut answers to this ambivalence and thus highlights the extent to which language acquisition and literacy are always complex and not easily contained by widely accepted constructs such as the literacy myth.

Conclusion

The reception of *Grammatica* has tended to read the novel as either a poignant reflection of the language-identity nexus or as a poor work of literature due to a mismatch between form and content. In this chapter, I have argued that such readings are misleading and reductive since they overlook a key component of the text, that is, the incidence of representations of language acquisition and literacy. By applying the literacy narrative approach and the idea that language acquisition and literacy are always contextually determined, I have argued that *Grammatica* is a literacy narrative that deconstructs the literacy myth (the widespread idea that literacy is always beneficial for those who learn it) and that provides an allegorical rendition of the

historical processes that have caused essay-text literacy to become a dominant literacy practice.

In the next chapter, I discuss Vincenzo Rabito's autobiography *Terra matta*, a text whose publication trajectory resembles that of Sampo's memoir. Rabito typed his autobiography on a typewriter using an ungrammatical mixture of Sicilian dialect and standard Italian which makes comprehension very difficult. The typescript was heavily redacted prior to publication to facilitate reading and comprehension. An analysis of these changes through the lens of the literacy narrative approach suggests that the changes stem from preconceived ideas about class and illiteracy and that they could have been handled differently. If we read *Grammatica* in the light of *Terra matta*, we can say that, through fiction and the logic of the literacy narrative, *Grammatica* also provides an insightful portrayal of relation between editing, publishing and literacy.

CHAPTER 4: ILLITERACY, CLASS AND MULTIMODALITY IN VINCENZO RABITO'S *TERRA MATTA*

[E]ven an individual labelled "illiterate" by the established norms of […] *society has some knowledge of the uses and functions of literacy as part of his or her communicative competence. In becoming a competent member of a social group, one does not learn the forms of communicating common to family or community or society as separate packages which are only later applied to other arenas. Instead the acquisition of communicative competence proceeds through immersion in cultural practices that include oral and written language modalities.* James Collins and Richard Blot (2009: 39)

When one grants that there are many ways of forming, taking and using texts, it turns out that even within so-called non-literate societies, many people are engaged with texts in some way or another. David Olson (2009: 569)

Many people labelled "illiterate" […] may, from a more culturally sensitive viewpoint, be seen to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in specific contexts. For instance, studies suggest that even nonliterate individuals find themselves engaged in literacy activities, an indication that the boundary between literate and nonliterate is less obvious than individual measures of literacy suggest. Brian Street (2009: 338)

The quotations above speak of the ubiquity of writing and of the consequences that this has for definitions of literacy and illiteracy. Nowadays, we find written language in advertisements, films, text messages, eyesight tests, on social networks, on graffiti, in video games, in prayer books and on cereal boxes. Writing can be used for so many different purposes and shapes so many areas of the modern world that, as Olson and Street above put it, anyone is likely to "engage with texts and in literacy activities" in some way or another. In other words, anyone is likely to read and write texts at various points during their lives. As a result, it can be difficult to uphold firm distinction between literacy and illiteracy, just as it can be difficult to assign with absolute certainty the label "illiterate" or

"non-literate" to anyone. The ubiquity of writing and, concomitantly, of reading make the concept of illiteracy unstable, almost redundant.

This may not be the colloquial understanding of literacy and illiteracy. As Harvey Graff has noted: "The literate and the illiterate tend to be diametrically and dichotomically opposed: with respect not only to reading and writing, but also to a range of personal, cultural and communicative characteristics" (1987: 374). In everyday parlance, people tend to draw great divides between literacy and illiteracy. Literacy is usually defined as "the ability to read and write" while illiteracy is defined as the lack of this ability. Further, illiteracy evokes ignorance, orality, backwardness, primitivism, poverty and uncivilization. Conversely, literacy connects with progress, modernity, schooling, wealth and ethical behaviour. These connections have a long lineage: "Literacy came to be seen as the mark of a 'liberally educated or learned person' as early as 1550 (OED department, 1980), at a time when few people had access to this technology [reading and writing]" (Janks 2010: 3). Significantly, languages that do not have a word for "literate", such as Italian, French and Albanian render this word as "educated", "schooled" and "learned" ("colto" and "istruito" in Italian, "cultivé" and "instruit" in French, "i shkolluar" in Albanian).[1]

Differences between literacy and illiteracy are so stark and deeply rooted that to alter them "requires an active exercise of the mind and will" (Graff 1987: 374). The quotations above in fact reflect the perspective of scholars affiliated to the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS). NLS scholars suspend judgment regarding what counts as literacy or illiteracy and envisage instead multiple "literacy practices". "Literacy practice" refers to the various ways in which individuals and social groups engage reading and writing (Street 1984: 95-129; Street 1993: 7-10; Baynham and Prinsloo 2009: 2-7; Barton 2009: 39; Purcell-Gates 2010 3-4; Street 2012: 27-29). Literacy practices can be defined by time, space, subject positioning (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.), power (their ranking in the "linguistic market"), the epistemological function that literacy has for the individual, and multimodality, that is, interactions with other semiotic modes (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Baynham and Prinsloo 2009: 5). The different ways in which these (and other) factors can combine make literacy plural.

[1] The word "alfabetizzato" can be used in Italian. "Alfabetizzato" is more neutral and does not connect with schooling as forcefully as "colto" but it is mostly found in academic pieces and journalism.

NLS has developed mainly via ethnography and its scholarship typically consists of "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973: 3-30; Bloome 2012), that is, carefully contextualised and historicised studies of individuals from all sorts of backgrounds engaging literacy as part of their everyday lives. However, NLS has focussed mainly on "'vernacular' or non-dominant literacy practices" (Janks 2010:199). Through NLS's "thick descriptions", we can learn about the literacy practices and lives of social groups that are ordinarily associated more with illiteracy than literacy, e.g. Sudanese refugees (Perry 2010) and "at-risk" adolescents in the U.S. (Gallagher 2010). Documenting the "vernacular" literacies that exist is a response to the ideological nature of literacy, that is, to its complicity in the "process of maintaining domination" (Thompson 1984: 4). As Janks has argued, these literacies are "at best overlooked or ignored by social elites and dominant institutions and at worst denigrated and constructed as deficient" (2010: 119). Documenting them and making them visible is a step towards redressing these power imbalances. Moreover, it can counteract a widespread tendency to frame as "illiterate" people who are, in fact, able to read and write and who engage with literacy for many purposes in their daily lives.

The word "illiterate" should be used with care. Unlike "literate", it only provides negative subject positions – primitive, deficient, backward, poor, uneducated. By using "literate" and "Illiterate" advisedly, NLS scholars aim to impact teachers, educational policies and NGOs (e.g. UNESCO) which organise literacy campaigns in underdeveloped countries. As Brian Street explains:

> When literacy campaigns and educationalists claim to bring literacy to the illiterate – "light to darkness", as it is frequently characterised […], I find myself asking first what local literacy practices are in place and how do they relate to the literacy practices being introduced by the campaigners and educators? Research, then, is tasked with making visible the complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices and challenging dominant stereotypes and myopia. (2009: 340)

Identifying literacy practices amongst those deemed illiterate erodes prejudice and creates a better-informed foundation for literacy campaigns and educational programmes. This, in

turn, increases the chances of their success because educators can build on existing practices and knowledge.[2]

In Chapter 1, I put forward the literacy narrative approach, a theoretical framework for the interpretation of representations of language acquisition and literacy based on the tenets of NLS. This approach rejects the great divide between literate and illiterate and is based on the premise that representations of language learning and literacy, which I have termed "literacy narratives" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992), are tied to ideology, history and multimodality (the coexistence of different semiotic modes, verbal and non-verbal). Literacy narratives, in other words, draw upon, and reformulate, the extra-textual dimension of literacy and language learning. The critic, therefore, should interpret them by focussing on conflicts over different semiotic modes. To navigate literacy narratives, this approach uses three tools: the "competing logics of the literacy narrative" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 529), the "operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 516) and the "regionalising of literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 523-529).

In Chapters 2 and 3, I focussed on identifying conflicts between semiotic modes and literacy practices in the text and discussed whether the text reproduces and/or challenges how literacy and language learning are deployed and conceptualised extra-textually. To navigate the literacy narratives, I used the competing logics, the regionalising of literacy and the operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy. In this chapter, I apply the literacy narrative approach and the regionalising of literacy to Vincenzo Rabito's autobiography *Terra matta* (2007) as a case study about the benefits of approaching illiteracy from what Street (above) calls a "culturally sensitive viewpoint". In other words, I focus on the benefits of never taking illiteracy for granted and of approaching a character's language learning experiences as a NLS ethnographer would, that is, by granting that literacy is plural and that there are (to re-quote Olson above) "many ways of forming, taking and using texts".

[2]The work by TML on multilingualism is rooted in a similar rejection of ideological prejudices: "Statements on the merits and failures of multiculturalism, for instance, often incorporate assessments of the relative values of different language strategies such as acculturation, assimilation or plurilingualism. Yet positions taken on these issues tend to be strongly influenced by ideological assumptions. The homolingual model of the nation, in particular, remains widespread even in the face of growing historical evidence of its inaccuracy (Sakai, 1997; Tymoczko, 2006)." ("Transnationalising Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity & Translation in Modern Italian Cultures" 2014-2017: n.p.).

Rabito was born in 1899 in Chiaramonte Gulfi, a rural village near the town of Ragusa (Sicily). He started to work as a *bracciante* (agricultural labourer, peasant) at the age of seven to support his widowed mother and his six siblings. The condition of a *bracciante* was very precarious. A *bracciante* did not own any land and relied on casual hiring by landowners for their sustenance. Rabito did not go to school and was brought up speaking the Sicilian dialect of the Iblei region (South-East Sicily). He taught himself to read and write standard Italian at the age of fifteen using his younger sister's schoolbooks (Rabito 2007:15).[3] Rabito started composing his autobiography when he was seventy. He typed it on an Olivetti typewriter over three years, between 1968 and 1971 (Moss 2014a: 326).[4] Between 1971 and 1972, Rabito let his youngest son Giovanni take the typescript to Bologna where he was studying law since Giovanni wanted to submit it to publishers and literary figures. Giovanni never returned the typescript to his father, who started to type a second version of his autobiography which features the same idiosyncrasies as the first. To date, the second version is unpublished and remains with Turiddo, Rabito's eldest son (Moss 2014b; Moss 2017: private correspondence).

Content-wise, the typescript chronicles the injustice Rabito had to endure because of his social class and the most important events of modern Italian history, which Rabito witnessed first-hand (e.g. the World Wars, Fascism, the boom of the Sixties). Alongside the theme of injustice and Italian history, the autobiography contains a literacy narrative which charts Rabito's autodidactic efforts. As far as style and language go, Rabito consistently disregarded the conventions of prose writing (paragraph indentations, chapter breaks) and used an invented ungrammatical idiolect that fuses Italian and Sicilian dialect and that has a punctuation mark after every word. As a result, the typescript is very difficult to read and understand.

[3] Rabito's sister received a degree of formal instruction at primary level because she was much younger than Rabito. In the West, until the early twentieth century, for poor and working-class families, children's schooling had a low priority due to children's "direct economic value to the family" (Graff 1987: 345). Children were first and foremost workforce; however, "primary-school attendance rates increased through the birth order" since older children were tasked first with providing subsistence for the family (Graff 1987: 345). This is particularly relevant for Italy, where, throughout the nineteenth century, literacy rates were amongst the lowest in the West (Graff 1987: 297).

[4] The peritext (dustjacket, covers, publisher's notes) of all the editions of *Terra matta* state that the typescript was composed over seven years (1968-1975). In 2008, Rabito's son Giovanni rectified this information (Giovanni Rabito 2008: n.p.) and claimed that it had been composed between 1968 and 1971. Nevertheless, the peritext and critics still state that the composition took seven years. The effects of this will be discussed later.

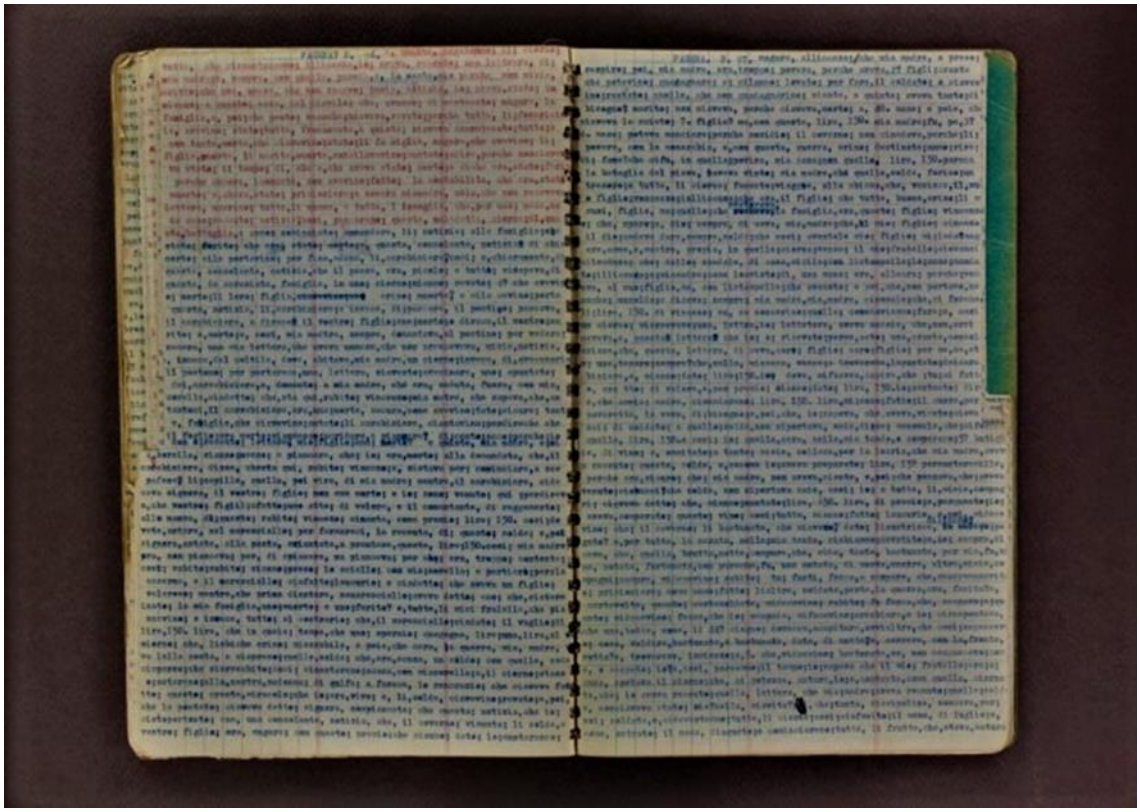


Figure 5 Pages from Rabito's original typescript.[5]

The typescript appeared posthumously. Rabito died in 1981. In 1999, Giovanni deposited the typescript at the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (The National Archive for Life Writing). Based in Pieve Santo Stefano (Tuscany), the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (ADN) specialises in *scritture popolari*, that is, autobiographical writing by non-professional writers and not meant for publication (Iuso 2014). In 2000, the typescript won Il Premio Pieve, a literary prize associated with the ADN. In 2007, Einaudi, one of Italy's most prestigious publishing houses, published Rabito's autobiography. To facilitate comprehension, the editors, Luca Ricci and Evelina Santangelo, edited some of the aspects of the typescript and brought them into line with the conventions of prose writing, punctuation and Italian grammar.

Terra matta was a commercial success. It was hailed as a rare and valuable example of history "from below", from the point of view of a subaltern. Due to its historical content, it was compared to Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* (1958/2014), one of the pillars of the Italian canon. It sold 15,000 hardcover copies in three months (Moss 2014c: 223) and

[5] Source: "L'Archivio diari di Pieve Santo Stefano diventa digitale" (2016: n.p.)

was followed by two paperback editions in 2008 and 2014. The book enjoyed enthusiastic national and regional press coverage. In 2008, an adaptation of the book was performed in the theatre (Moss 2014c: 223). In 2012, director Costanza Quatriglio released a film-documentary based on the book entitled *Terramatta; Il Novecento italiano di Vincenzo Rabito analfabeta Siciliano* (*Madland*; *The Italian Twentieth Century by Vincenzo Rabito, a Sicilian Illiterate*) which won several national and international prizes (Moss 2014c: 223). In 2014, The *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* devoted a special issue to the book. There is also a website called *Progetto Terra matta* which provides reviews, articles and information about the typescript and the film.[6]

The editing process has been praised and never questioned. The consensus at Einaudi, at the ADN and amongst critics is that the typescript is too difficult to understand and that most of its peculiarities are random mistakes due to Rabito's lack of schooling. Aside from an article by the Italianist David Moss (2014a) which I will discuss in due course, Rabito has been described as illiterate or, at best, as semi-illiterate or semi-literate. At the outset of his autobiography, Rabito himself claims that he is "inafabeto" (a word which in his idiolect presumably means "illiterate") due to his lack of schooling: "Io era piccolo ma era pieno di coraggio, con pure che invece di anatare alla scuola sono antato allavorare da 7 anne, che restaie completamente inafabeto" (4).[7] However, in this chapter, I argue that the idea that Rabito was illiterate can be challenged and that it stems from the correlation between literacy, schooling and class and a tendency within the ADN to privilege historiography over literature. Moreover, I apply the literacy narrative approach to *Terra matta* and the typescript and argue that *Terra matta* contains a literacy narrative which suggest that Rabito was in fact familiar with standard Italian and grammar and that the typescript's idiosyncrasies are not meaningless mistakes but deliberate stylistic choices which form a multimodal literacy narrative which reinforces the literacy narrative present in *Terra matta.*

[6] Source: *Progetto Terra matta* <http://www.cliomediaofficina.it/progettoterramatta/> [accessed 2 October 2016]

[7] I was just a child but I was so brave! On top of everything, instead of going to school, I went to work when I was 7, so I remained completely illiterate.

Citations from *Terra matta* are from the 2007 hardback edition and, from now on, will only be followed by the page number in round parentheses. The English translations are mine.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 1 addresses the relation between illiteracy and class from an historical standpoint. Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 are about the typescript. I devote four sections to the typescript because my argument depends on an understanding of its features, of the changes it underwent before reaching the public and of its reception. Section 2 describes the typescript's style, materiality and language. Section 3 explains the selection process of Il Premio Pieve and the interface that this prize has established between historiography and literature. Section 4 illustrates the journey that took the typescript from Rabito's home in Ragusa (Sicily) to the ADN, Il Premio, and, latterly, Einaudi over a period of twenty-six years. I argue that Rabito's son Giovanni has played an important role in shaping how the typescript and Rabito were first received by the archive and then the public. This section also addresses the changes made by Einaudi and provides a plot summary. In Section 5, I discuss the reception of the book and David Moss's article and argue that some aspects of the reception may be purely fictional. The last two sections examine *Terra matta* and the typescript. In section 6, I analyse *Terra matta*'s literacy narrative and I argue that Rabito's initial self-definition as an "inafabeto" is a reflection of how other people perceived him and of Rabito's own way of "regionalising" literacy. In section 7, I discuss the multimodality of the typescript and argue that its departures from normative practices are meaningful tactile and visual symbols which reflect and enhance the literacy narrative present in the text.

It should be stressed at this point that the original typescript is currently held at the ADN and that access to it is restricted. The ADN made photocopies of the typescript to be used by the jury of Il Premio and the Einaudi editors. These photocopies are now used by researchers who wants to study the typescript. The photocopied typescripts contain all the pages of the original, but they are also different since they cannot reproduce its materiality and multimodality. In April 2017, I visited the ADN and examined both the original (under strict supervision) and a photocopied version. The discussion that follows draws from both. Therefore, when confusion between the typescripts arises, I will refer to the original typescript as "typescript A" and to the photocopy as "typescript B". Regarding the plot summary provided in Section 3, this is based on the published book and does not coincide with the storyline of the typescript. The Einaudi editors, Luca Ricci and Evelina Santangelo, claim that all the events described by Rabito are included in the published version and that they only suppressed sections in which Rabito was repeating himself, or did not express

himself clearly (in Rabito 2007: vii; Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 257, 262-263). Rabito's typescript is 1,027 pages long and, therefore, a detailed comparison between this latter and the published book is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, having compared samples of typescript B with the Einaudi version, it is possible to conclude that the published version renders the storyline accurately.

Overall, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the advantages of approaching literacy narratives and their authors from a theoretical standpoint that questions illiteracy and that acknowledges the ubiquity and plurality of literacy. This can alter the reception of a text like *Terra matta* which, since its first contacts with the reading public, has been framed as a text written by someone with poor or no literacy skills. Furthermore, it can unearth some of the sociohistorical dynamics that regulate how we define and conceptualise literacy and illiteracy.

4.1 Literacy, social class and the classroom: a changing correlation?

Since his appearance in the literary panorama, Rabito has consistently been described as someone with no or low literacy skills. We find the word "analfabeta" (illiterate) in an article by historian Chiara Ottaviano (2009: n.p.) and in the title of Quatriglio's film –*Terramatta; Il Novecento italiano di Vincenzo Rabito analfabeta siciliano*. Critics Silvia Ragusa and Sergio Luzzato have used the synonyms "illetterato" (Ragusa 2008a: 39) and "inalfabeto" (Luzzato 2007:49; Ragusa 2008b: 13).[8] Some have opted for gradations of "analfabeta". Alessio Conca (2007: 15) and Gigi Razete (2008: 12) have used "semianalfabeta" (semi-illiterate) while Enzo Di Mauro has used "pressoché analfabeta" (almost illiterate) (2007: 22). Sometimes, different gradations are used in a single piece of criticism. Di Mauro (2007: 22) switches from "pressoché analfabeta" to "analfabeta" after a few paragraphs (2007: 22); Loredana Cacicia uses "analfabeta" in the title but switches to "semianalfabeta" in the main body of the article (2007: 8).

To most lay readers and, even, to most literary critics not familiar with NLS, these definitions would probably seem unproblematic and logical since they originate from observable and empirically verifiable ways of practising and conceptualising literacy. As

[8] "Inalfabeto" is not standard Italian and it is presumably derived from the *rabitese* "inafabeto" that we find in *Terra matta* (2007: 4, 15, 357).

explained in the Introduction to this thesis, as far as literacy and language acquisition go, we live in the legacy of the nineteenth-century literacy campaigns that accompanied nation-building. These campaigns were aimed at the masses and distributed literacy through compulsory and centralised education systems controlled by nation-states themselves. In the classroom, language and literacy acquisition adhered to the parameters of "essay-text literacy" (a literacy practice which involves learning the standard and grammatically correct version of a given national language and the ability to manage print). Nineteenth-century literacy campaigns forged a correlation between literacy, schooling and grammatically correct language which still informs how we practise literacy, and which seems natural and inevitable. Jenny Cook-Gumperz has argued that "[s]ince the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been unquestionably assumed that literacy is both the purpose and the product of schooling" (2006: 19). But we can also argue that it is now "unquestionably assumed" that essay-text literacy is both the purpose and product of schooling and literacy. Since Rabito did not go school and his typescript does not adhere to the language fostered by essay-text literacy, it makes sense to label him as illiterate and/or almost illiterate.

Another observable reality that undergirds the definitions illustrated above is the correlation between illiteracy, poverty and class. In *The Violence of Literacy* (1991), a book which denounces how literacy educators can perpetuate social inequality, Elspeth Stuckey claims that "illiteracy is a fact of disenfranchised life" (1991: 101). UNESCO, which sets up literacy campaigns worldwide, has a slogan: "The map of illiteracy is the map of poverty" (in Arnove and Graff 1987: 19). According to Hilary Janks, "literacy is just one among many social 'goods' that are distributed" (2010: 5). She argues that "[w]hile world literacy statistics are always open to interpretation, it is clear that literacy levels in the wealthy, developed countries, the political north, are much higher than those of poor, undeveloped countries in the political south"(2010: 5). Rabito can be said to corroborate these statements. He started off as a *bracciante* and, therefore, was poor and disenfranchised. Moreover, he came from the South of Italy where poverty and illiteracy rates have been the lowest in Italy since at least the Middle Ages (Graff 1987: 297-298).

From his social class, to his job, to his geographical origins through to his autodidacticism, Rabito is a concentration of factors that point to illiteracy. Nevertheless, as Janks above suggests, "statistics are always open to interpretation". Statistics may convey some aspects of reality, but they are also generalisations which mask exceptions and

individual differences and that, if accepted uncritically, can lead to stereotypes. The same can be said of the correlation between literacy, the classroom and essay-text literacy. This has become the norm, but it is also a historical contingency produced by European and North American societies around the nineteenth century. Other ways of practising literacy are possible (see Introduction).

For instance, enslaved Africans in the antebellum American South were forbidden from going to school and from learning to read and write. If they were caught trying to read and write, they risked torture and mutilation (Cornelius 2007: 317). Nevertheless, some of them became literate: "White children often taught their slave playmates secretly or without conscious violation of law and customs" (Cornelius 2007: 319). There were also instances of autodidacticism: "Benjamin Holmes, apprentice tailor in Charleston, studied all the signs and all the names on the doors where he carried bundles and asked people to tell him a word or two at a time. By the time he was twelve, he found he could read newspapers" (Cornelius 2007: 322). Rabito was an autodidact and a *bracciante* from the South of Italy but this does rules out neither literacy nor mastery of normative practices. These can be learned without going to school.

There is a sense, therefore, in which Rabito could be more literate than the vocabulary employed by critics suggest. Moreover, the vocabulary itself can be deconstructed. "Analfabeta" does not mean the same as "semianalfabeta". The former means "unable to read and write" while the latter conveys a degree of literacy. The typescript and the book themselves are a token of literacy which undermines the idea of illiteracy. As Giovanni (Rabito's son) has noted in a video about his father: "C'è contraddizione tra analfabeta e scrittore" (there is a contradiction between illiterate and writer) ("Biografilm 2012 - Rabito, Vincenzo" 2012: 1′ 49″-2′ 09″). In other words, how can an illiterate write? But, more specifically, how can an illiterate person become an acclaimed writer and write a masterpiece?

On the one hand, these contradictions coexist unproblematically in the reception because they create an aura of enigma which the reading public finds appealing and because they tap into the "literacy myth", the widely accepted idea that literacy has the power to improve individual lives and society (Graff 1979; Graff 2013). On the other hand, these contradictions make the idea that Rabito was illiterate unstable, open to interrogation. The aura of enigma around Rabito and the paradox of the illiterate writer are

indexical of unresolved issues and are in themselves an invitation to question how the book has been received. The literacy myth is, as Graff has argued, a highly unreliable way of conceptualising literacy (Graff 1979: xv-xvi; Graff 2013: 35-47). Literacy can be unpredictable and non-linear in its effects. The contradictions, paradoxes and myths which surround the idea that Rabito was illiterate call for a revision of Rabito and his work. In the next section, I examine the materiality of Rabito's original typescript to evaluate the extent to which it departs from normative practices.

4.2 Rabito's typescript: style, materiality and language

Rabito's original typescript (typescript A) is held at the ADN of Pieve Santo Stefano and can only be consulted at the archive under supervision by the archivists. Only the archivists can handle it both because the sheets and the binding are fragile and because all the *scritture popolari* held at the ADN are valuable documents under the patronage of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. If researchers wish to handle the typescript, they can do so very briefly. For longer inspections and photocopying, researchers are supplied with a black and white photocopy (typescript B). It is possible to garner information about typescript A without going to the ADN since it has been photographed and described by scholars and critics. However, the information that the reception provides does not always match first-hand observation. What follows, therefore, is an illustration of its features based on what I found at the ADN during a visit in April 2017. I describe typescript A's materiality (binding, type of paper, ink colour), the page layout, and aspects of Rabito's invented idiolect, highlighting discrepancies with the information provided in the text's reception.

Typescript A has no title and is a continuous piece of prose with neither paragraphs nor chapter breaks. It comprises 1,027 numbered pages subdivided into seven separate volumes. The first four volumes consist of A4 spiral bound *rubriche* (address books with thumb index) by La Standa, a large chain of department stores now disbanded. The *rubriche* have coloured cardboard covers with no patterns. To type on the *rubriche*'s sheets, Rabito opened the spiral binding, fed each sheet into the typewriter and then replaced them on the spiral, securing the spiral and the sheets with string. Rabito generally used black ink for typing but, in the second folder, he also typed entire sections using blue and red ink (see

Figure 5). The remaining three volumes consist of spiral bound notepads with patterned coloured cardboard covers. The notepads are smaller than an A4 sheet but bigger than an A5. Rabito typed on them using a landscape orientation and then replaced them on the spiral. The fifth and seventh folders are secured with plastic washing line string; for the sixth folder, Rabito used the same type of string used for the *rubriche.*

Figure 6 Rabito's four *rubriche* and the three notepads.[9]

Rabito's youngest son, Giovanni, who deposited the typescript at the ADN in 1999 and who has played a key role as spokesperson for his father ever since, has referred to the folders as "quadernoni" (large notebooks) (Giovanni Rabito 2008: n.p.) and "quaterni" (Giovanni Rabito 2008: n.p.), a Sicilian-inflected way of rendering the word "quaderni" (school notebook). In an interview with Giovanni by Enzo Fragapane (2017: n.p.) and in an article about Quatriglio's film ("La 'Terramatta' all'Istituto di Cultura" 2013: n.p.), the folders are also called "quaderni" by the journalists themselves.

We encountered the word "quaderno" in the previous chapter about Diego Marani's *Nuova grammatica finlandese* where I argued that this word denotes a writing pad that is usually saddle stitched and that is an essential part of a child's schooling equipment. Rabito's "quaterni" are not school notebooks but *rubriche* and spiral bound writing pads. However, Giovanni has confirmed that his father used to call them in this way

[9] Source: Iuso (2017: 86).

> perché in cartoleria era solito comprare per noi figli "scolarizzati" i quaderni (a righe o a quadretti) e quindi per estensione ha chiamato quaterni tutti gli articoli simili, sopratutto quelli appartenenti alla categoria "scrivere" o “fare di conto”! ... di certo non conosceva vocaboli quali "rubriche" e meno che meno "bloc notes"! (Giovanni Rabito 2019: private correspondence)[10]

According to Giovanni, “quaterno” was, for his father, a coverall term for paper-based writing tools because he did not know other words related to this semantic field. At the same time, Giovanni suggests that Rabito was familiar with the materiality of a “quaterno” and its specific functions (classroom learning). We also learn this from the opening pages of *Terra matta*, where Rabito tells us that a “quaterno” was necessary for schooling: “[M]ia sorella aveva 7 anne e antava alla scuola, ma, con quelle miserabile tempe, il desonesto coverno non dava neanche uno centesimo per potere comperare uno quaterno […]” (2007: 4).[11] We can, therefore, conclude that, for Rabito, the folders had the valence of “quaterni”.

Rabito may have typed on *rubriche* and notepads instead of “quaterni” because of their binding. As explained in Chapter 3, actual “quaderni” are saddle stitched, which means that the sheets are secured with staples down the notebook’s spine. It would have been more laborious to type on the sheets from a “quaterno”. After removing the staples (which is quite hard to do), Rabito would have had to deal with a double spread page which did not fit in the typewriter and which needed tearing down the middle. Moreover, it would have been difficult to secure the sheets together and almost impossible to replicate the saddle stitching. The *rubriche* and the notepads were a convenient alternative to a “quaterno” because they were spiral bound. Rabito only had to loosen the spiral, remove the sheets, replace them on the spiral and secure it with string.

All the editions of *Terra matta* include a “Nota dell’editore” (publisher’s note) which describes the layout of the pages: “[S]i tratta 1027 pagine a interlinea zero, senza un

[10] Because he used to buy “quaterni” (either ruled or with squares) for us, his “schooled” children, at the stationery’s and, therefore, by extension, he called “quaterni” all similar items, in particular those belonging to the “writing”, or “numeracy”, category! … Surely, he did not know words such as “rubriche”, let alone “writing pad”!

[11] My sister was 7 years old and went to school, but, those were hard times, the dishonest government did not give us a single penny to buy a quaterno […].

centimetro di margine superiore, né inferiore né laterale" (2007: v).[12] This information is found in subsequent reception of the book. Filippo Battaglia, for instance, reports it almost *verbatim* – "1027 pagine a interlinea zero, senza nemmeno un centimetro di margine, né inferiore né superiore" (2008: 3). Similarly, Alessio Conca explains that "la storia era contenuta in un manoscritto con pagine a interlinea zero, scritte senza lasciare un margine né superiore né inferiore né laterale" (in Rabito 2007: 15).[13] Mario Perrotta states that "la riga di sopra addirittura si tocca con quella di sotto per un totale di cinquanta e passa righe per foglio, epperdippiù senza margini ai lati" (2016: 83).[14] These descriptions have us visualise pages where lines almost overlap and where words run over the edges of the pages.

These descriptions do not reflect typescript A. The pages seem indeed extremely dense but this is not due to Rabito's typing. The notepads are "a quadretti" ("with small squares") while the *rubriche* are ruled and have horizontal lines partitioning the pages. This forms a very busy background grid which fills, and visually reduces, the space between the lines. In typescript B, this effect is accentuated because black and white photocopying reduces the definition of the grid and the contrast between the letters and the lines behind them. As Figures 7 and 8 show, there is line spacing (of around 0,3/0,4 centimetres) and the lines do not overlap. The spacing resembles that of a published book which needs to be economical in its use of space and paper. It is comparable to that of a dictionary entry and, interestingly, to the spacing used in the 2014 paperback edition of *Terra matta.* At times, the layout changes and resembles that of a narrative poem consisting of two- or three-line stanzas regularly separated by a larger blank space. Notwithstanding these unpredictable changes, the different layouts are carried over several pages and, therefore, have a degree of regularity. Regarding the margins, these are minimal but always present (usually between 0,5 and 0,3 centimetres) and justified. Some of the side margins of the notepads are not justified but are much larger than in the rest of the typescript.

[12] We are talking about 1027 pages with neither line spacing nor the slightest margin either at the top, at the bottom or at the sides.
[13] The story was contained in a manuscript whose pages had no line spacing, written without leaving any margin either at the top, at the bottom or at the sides.
[14] Each line actually almost touches the one below for a total of over fifty lines per sheet and, if this were not enough, there are no side margins.

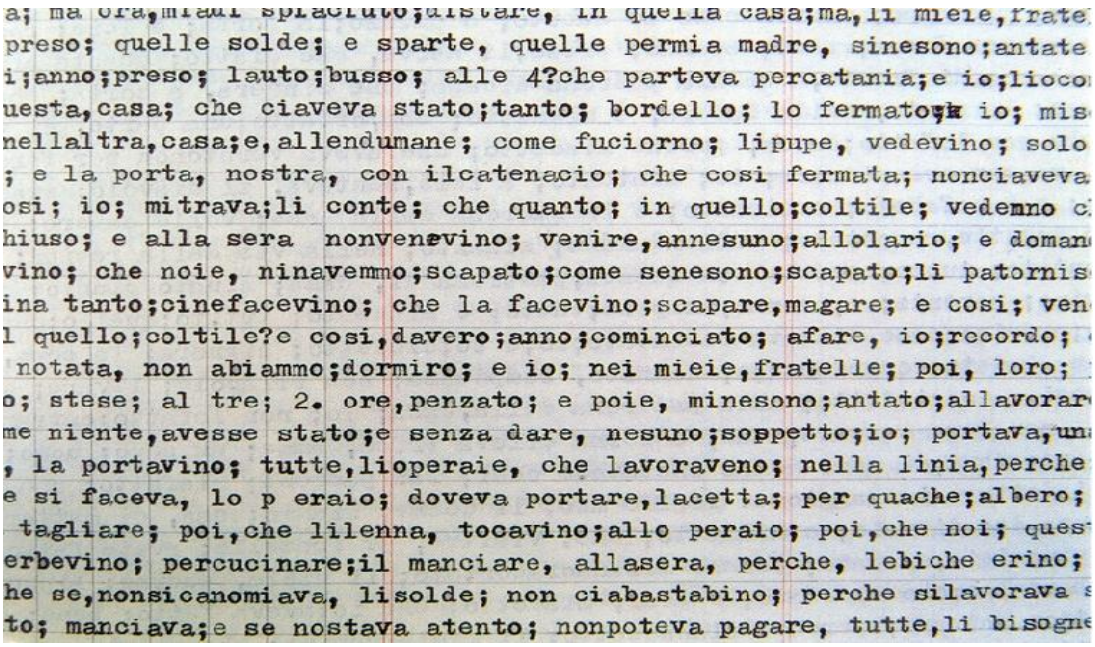

preso; quelle solde; e sparte, quelle permia madre, sinesono;antate
i;anno;preso; lauto;busso; alle 4?che parteva percatania;e io;lioco
uesta,casa; che ciaveva stato;tanto; bordello; lo fermato~~k~~ io; mis
nellaltra,casa;e,allendumane; come fuciorno; lipupe, vedevino; solo
; e la porta, nostra, con ilcatenacio; che cosi fermata; nonciaveva
osi; io; mitrava;li conte; che quanto; in quello;coltile; vedemno c
hiuso; e alla sera nonvenevino; venire,annesuno;allolario; e doman
vino; che noie, ninavemmo;scapato;come senesono;scapato;li patornis
ina tanto;cinefacevino; che la facevino;scapare,magare; e cosi; ven
l quello;coltile?c cosi,davero;anno;cominciato; afare, io;rcoordo;
notata, non abiammo;dormiro; e io; nei mieie,fratelle; poi, loro;
o; stese; al tre; 2. ore,penzato; e poie, minesono;antato;allavorar
me niente,avesse stato;e senza dare, nesuno;soppetto;io; portava,un
, la portavino; tutte,lioperaie, che lavoraveno; nella linia,perche
e si faceva, lo p eraio; doveva portare,lacetta; per quache;albero;
tagliare; poi,che lilenna, tocavino;allo peraio; poi,che noi; ques
erbevino; percucinare;il manciare, allasera, perche, lebiche erino;
he se,nonsicanomiava, lisolde; non ciabastabino; perche silavorava
to; manciava;e se nostava atento; nonpoteva pagare, tutte,li bisogn

Figure 7 A close up of a page from the *rubriche* (typescript A) showing the background lines and spacing.[15]

Figure 8 Pages from typescript A showing the presence of margins.[16]

Another important peculiarity of the typescript is its language and punctuation. Throughout, Rabito used an invented idiolect which Evelina Santangelo, one of the editors,

[15] Source: "Iniziate le riprese del film *Terramatta*" (2011: n.p.).
[16] Source: Carbonelli (2017: n.p.).

has called *rabitese* (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 261). *Rabitese* is described in some detail by the editors themselves in an introductory note included in *Terra matta* (in Rabito 2007: vii) and in an article about the rewriting process (Ricci and Santangelo 2014). Ricci and Santangelo define *rabitese* as a mixture of standard Italian and Sicilian dialect which disregards both grammatical rules (e.g. spelling conventions, subject-verb and adjective-noun agreement) and the norms of punctuation. *Rabitese* uses Sicilian words such as "babiata" ("scherzo" in Italian and "joke" in English) (Rabito 2007: 38) alongside standard Italian words and hybridises Sicilian and Italian in unpredictable ways without any one language taking over the other. For instance, "grande" (big, older) and "Giovanni" become "crante" and "Ciovanni" since the sound that is represented by the letter "g" in standard Italian is pronounced with a sound that is similar to that represented by the letter "c" in Sicilian. Rabito also often ran words together. For example, "diaiutarle" stands for "di aiutarle" in standard Italian ("to help them") and "famorire" stands for "fa morire" ("it kills you") (Ricci and Santangelo in Rabito 2007: vii). Regarding the punctuation, Rabito inserted a punctuation mark after every word. This is usually a semicolon but we often find commas as well. Full stops, question and exclamation marks are sometimes used, but they are rarer (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 258). Furthermore, Rabito "never used capital letters, inverted commas, apostrophes or pause marks" (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 258).

A comparison between typescript A, typescript B and how the critics and scholars have described typescript A suggests that relying on the text's critical reception to evaluate the typescript can be misleading. While the reception supplies accurate information regarding the features of *rabitese*, it exaggerates those of the layout. Rabito did not manage margins and line spacing as a professional writer would because he typed on areas that are usually left blank. At the same time, he had an awareness of the boundaries of the page and of line formatting. The reception may have exaggerated the density of the layout because the type of paper used by Rabito was already partitioned by lines and grids. Furthermore, access to typescript A is restricted and the editors worked with typescript B, which, being a photocopy, blurs lines and letters. Nevertheless, these exaggerations can also be viewed as a reflection of the idea that Rabito was not familiar with essay-text literacy and normative practices. Another factor that has reinforced this idea is the ADN's close relation with historiography and it is to this that we now turn.

4.3 The ADN and Il Premio Pieve: an interface between historiography and literature

The ADN was founded in 1984 by Saverio Tutino, a high-profile left-wing Italian journalist who had interviewed political leaders such as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung (Iuso 2014: 245). The ADN specialises in *scritture popolari*: autobiographical life writing by non-professional writers and not intended for public circulation. *Scritture popolari* generally consists of private correspondence, diaries and memoirs.[17] Anyone can deposit life writing at the ADN. The archive now holds around 7,000 manuscripts (Iuso 2017: 4). Many (but not all) are authored by the disenfranchised and those lacking formal education (working-class women, peasants, poor immigrants) and, as Anna Iuso has noted, many are "ungrammatical and usually unable to translate […] details into a coherent narrative" (2014: 248). In 2013, the ADN founded "Il piccolo museo del diario" (The Small Diary Museum), an interactive and multisensory museum located beside the archive. Spread over four small rooms, the museum presents and describes some of the *scritture popolari* held at the archive as well as aspects of Tutino's thought and work. Out of the four rooms, one is devoted to Rabito.[18]

Tutino founded the ADN with historiography in mind. He wanted to create a public record of Italian history "from below", from the point of view of ordinary people, of those usually left out from history books and official records.[19] In Europe, there are other archives with a similar mission. The "Archivio della Scrittura Popolare" in Trento (Italy) (Iuso 2014: 243), the "Association pour l'Autobiographie" in France,[20] the "Arxiu de la Memòria Popular" in Spain[21] and the "Tagebucharchiv" in Germany.[22] However, the ADN stands out from these archives because of Il Premio Pieve and the links that this award has established with literature and the publishing industry.

[17] Italianist David Moss uses the term "the domestic mode of production" (2014a: 318) to refer to *scritture popolari*.
[18] Source: *Il piccolo museo del diario* <https://www.piccolomuseodeldiario.it/> [accessed 3 January 2020]
[19] Source: *Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* <http://www.archiviodiari.org> [accessed 28 June 2017]
[20] Source: *Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique* <autobiographie.sitapa.org> [accessed 28 June 2017]
[21] Source: *Bloc de l'Arxiu de la Memòria Popular* <www.laroca.cat/arxiumemoria/memorial.htm> [accessed 28 June 2017]
[22] Source: *Deutsches Tagebucharchiv* <https://tagebucharchiv.de> [accessed 28 June 2017]

Il Premio was set up by Tutino himself in 1985 to give visibility to the archive and to encourage people to deposit material. It is held every year and to participate, the author needs to fill in a form requesting formal entry in the prize. If the manuscript reaches the ADN posthumously (as in the case of Rabito), it is up to the owner/heir of the manuscript to request entry. The form asks for information such as the author's name and date of birth, a summary of the author's life and of the manuscript's content. There is also a section titled "Descrizione del manoscritto originale" which asks for a description of the manuscript's materiality (e.g. type of notebook/sheets, paper quality, colour), the writing technology used (handwriting/typewriter), the location of the original manuscript and whether the owner/author is willing to deposit it at the archive. Since the ADN only accepts originals, the form also asks the entrant to declare if the manuscript has been rewritten in any way.

The ADN appoints a "commissione di lettura" (reading group) made up of volunteers to shortlist the entries. Anyone can apply to become a member of the reading group, but applicants must be residents of the Val Tiberina (Pieve Santo Stefano's surrounding areas) to be able to attend meetings regularly.[23] The reading group must select eight entries [24] using two main criteria: the manuscript must "illuminate a specific social and historical context" and must "bring out the individuality of the author's life" (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 253-254). Throughout the selection process, the reading group uses black and white photocopies of the original manuscripts/typescripts. The eight finalists are submitted to a "giuria nazionale" (national jury) made up of high-profile writers and scholars. Besides a small cash prize, the award includes the ADN's commitment to finding a publisher for the winner.

The criteria used to award Il Premio create an interface between historiography and literature. The criterion "the manuscript must illuminate a specific social and historical context" suggests that the *scritture popolari* selected for Il Premio are viewed as historical documents about extra-textual events. Put differently, they are considered contributions to historiography. The criterion "the manuscript must bring out the individuality of the author's life" reflects the logic of Western autobiography. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have noted, Western autobiography focusses on a protagonist (usually male) who

[23] I am indebted to Natalia Cangi, ADN director, for the information about Il Premio's rules.
[24] In 2000, when Rabito competed for Il Premio, the rules were different and the reading group shortlisted ten manuscripts.

overcomes obstacles to achieve maturity (2010: 2-3) and who encodes "greatness", "individuality and separateness over relationality" (2010: 202-203). This suggests that the texts shortlisted are also considered autobiographies like those written by professional writers. Il Premio and the ADN view the manuscripts shortlisted both as historical documents and literary texts.

This is a remarkable stance to take for an institution whose mission is to give visibility to writings by the lower classes and the uneducated. As Carolyn Steedman has noted:

> "[W]orking class writing of whatever sort is seen as the historian's territory – as not belonging to 'literature" or to the literary scholar. When Fox [a literary scholar] was working on twentieth-century worker-writers, she kept encountering people who assumed that if this were her topic, she *must* be a historian, working on texts that belong to the realm of 'fact' or 'reality' rather than 'fiction' and 'literature'. Moreover, working-class writing has not been used to construct autobiographical theory, as has women's writing. (2009: 222, Steedman's italics).

However, there is an imbalance at the ADN. The *scritture popolari*'s value as historical documents is usually foregrounded over their literariness. Analytics such as the uses of tropes, the role of fiction and memory in autobiographical writing, intertextuality, the influence of past writers and movements, the envisaging of a large reading public are overlooked or considered cursorily. For example, the March 2017 issue of *Primapersona* (the ADN journal) presents twenty-two of the most "fascinating" memoirs held at archive (Iuso 2017: 4). The presentations use the same template used by "Il piccolo museo del diario" for introducing the memoirs to visitors (which I was able to observe on my visit in April 2017). They stress the geographical places and historical events mentioned by the memoirs, when and where they were written, their materiality and the author's occupation. The memoirs are framed principally as efforts to "lasciare una traccia di sé, che si tratti di dare conto della propria attività pubblica o di fermare sulla pagina […] la profondità dei

sentimenti verso i familiari più stretti" [25] and/or as "fonti ponderose, che sono fitte di indicazioni su ambienti e uomini, situazioni politiche e professionali […]" (Baioni in Iuso 2017: 13).[26]

The *scritture popolari* stored at the ADN are conceptualised by the institution primarily as means for being remembered, as tokens of affection and/or as historical documents for researchers. They are not discussed as a critic would discuss a literary work. On the one hand, this is justifiable since analytics used for literary criticism have developed through the study of works by professional writers. Therefore, they may not be applicable to non-professional and uneducated writers who, presumably, did not hope to be published and were not members of literary movements. On the other, these analytics are transferable and could yield new insights into *scritture popolari* and their authors. Furthermore, although the authors of these writings did not have access to literary circles, they may still have had some knowledge of the literary panorama and may have dreamed of being published one day. Acknowledging the literariness of *scritture popolari* in a more systematic way can influence the assessment of authors who, like Rabito, wrote ungrammatically and had not received formal instruction. It can make the reading public and critics less likely to label them as illiterate and more likely to look for alternative ways of conceptualising departures from the norm. The privileging of historiography over literariness has shaped how the typescript was received by the ADN and subsequently Einaudi. For both the ADN and Einaudi, it was first and foremost a valuable historical document by someone who could not read or write very well and who did not have any literary aspirations.

4.4 The trajectory of the typescript: from Giovanni to the ADN and Einaudi

When Rabito started to compose his autobiography, he had already retired and had moved to the city of Ragusa. Giovanni had left home to pursue his university studies in Bologna (Northern Italy). However, he had taken an interest in the "quaterni" and, during his visits

[25] To leave a trace of yourself, which may involve accounting for your public life or fixing on the page the depth of your love and affection for your closest relatives.
[26] Extremely rich sources, packed with information about places, people, political and professional contexts […].

home, he would read them with friends.[27] Between 1970 and 1971, he took them to Bologna with him with a view to having them published. At that time, Giovanni was a law student but his main interests were poetry and literature. In 1968, he had a book of lyrical love poems published (Rabito 2007: 382) but he soon turned away from this genre and joined the Neoavanguadia and Il Gruppo 63, publishing his poetry in the journals *Techné* and *Marcatré* (Battaglia 2008: 3; Fragapane 2017: n.p.).

The Neoavanguardia and Il Gruppo 63 were experimentalist literary movements that openly opposed middle-class culture, capitalism and the educational system. Their fiction challenged the conventions of Realism and Italian Neorealism (e.g. omniscient narrator, plot-driven narrative), made use of metalinguistic digressions about writing and of informal registers and regional dialects (Sbrilli 1991: 510-511, 567-569, 571-575). The poetry of this period is exemplified by "la poesia visiva" (visual poetry). Visual poetry is consciously multimodal since it makes use of the visual affordances of writing and typography (the shape of letters, typefaces, calligraphy) to make meaning and to deconstruct widely accepted signifier-signified relationships (Wedel de Stasio 1989: 137-138). In 1972, Giovanni published a narrative poem belonging to this genre which he has described as follows: "[Ha] una grafica impossibile da riprodurre su Word (c'erano anche molte parti aggiunte a penna)" (2017: private correspondence).[28]

Giovanni circulated the typescript amongst the experimentalists because he could see similarities between their style and narrative techniques and the typescript's idiosyncrasies (Giovanni Rabito 2008: n.p.). Literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa, in a 2007 interview given on the eve of the publication of *Terra matta*, described Rabito's writing as an "esperimento linguistico" and aligned it with the Neoavanguardia (in Ottaviano 2009: n.p.). Nevertheless, in the 1970s, Giovanni's literary circles deemed it "bello, suggestivo ma impubblicabile" (beautiful, suggestive but unpublishable) (Giovanni Rabito in Battaglia 2008: 3). After his father's death in 1981, Giovanni submitted the typescript to Mondadori and Rizzoli (two major publishing houses) but he received a similar response (Fragapane 2017:

[27] One of Giovanni's friends was the actor Roberto Nobile. Nobile is now known for playing Niccolò Zito (director of the TV channel *Rete Libera*) in the *Inspector Montalbano* series. He also impersonates Rabito's narrative voice in the film adaptation of *Terra matta.* Nobile has claimed that he has known *Terra matta* "from birth" ("Roberto Nobile: voce narrante" <www.cliomediaofficina.it/progettoterramatta/?page_id=125> [accessed 3 May 2017]). Like Giovanni, Nobile tried his hand at poetry in the late Sixties (Giovanni Rabito 2017: private correspondence).

[28] Its graphic qualities are impossible to reproduce with Word (there were also many parts added in pen).

n.p.). In 1999, Giovanni went to the ADN in person to enter his father's work in Il Premio. For fear of another rejection, Giovanni had rewritten it and added the title *Fontanazza.*[29] On the entry form, under the rubric "Descrizione del manoscritto originale" (Description of the original manuscript), Giovanni declared that *Fontanazza* was not the original.[30] He specified that the original had been written "in maniera primitiva; da uno che non sa scrivere a macchina".[31] Giovanni was therefore asked by the archivists to produce the original, which he did. Consistently with the archive's rules, the original (and *not* Giovanni's rewriting) competed in Il Premio. However, as Rabito had not given it a title, it was entered as *Fontanazza.*

The reading group found the typescript very hard to read (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 254-253). Many judges "confessed that they had been unable to read more than a few pages" (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 254). However, they all agreed that Rabito was a compelling storyteller, that the language was original (albeit very difficult to follow) and that the content was extremely valuable because it represented some of the most momentous events of Italian history from 1899 till the late Sixties. Most importantly, these were narrated from the point of view of a subaltern and, therefore, constituted a substantial contribution to historiography (in Rabito 2007: v; Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 254). Chiara Ottaviano, historian and scriptwriter of Quatriglio's film, has argued that "Rabito provides the only first-hand text that describes in detail the militarisation of prostitution" (2014: 271), that is, the creation of brothels by army officials to manage their, and the soldiers', sexual needs (74-75). *Fontanazza* stood out from the other memoirs because it told an engaging life story and combined it with first-hand descriptions of both well-known and lesser-unknown historical events as experienced by a subaltern. *Fontanazza* was, in other words, a well written autobiography and substantial contribution to historiography.

When *Fontanazza* was awarded Il Premio, the jury's encomium defined it as a "*Gattopardo* popolare" (a working-class *Gattopardo*) ("La motivazione del premio del 2000" 2000: n.p.). *Il Gattopardo* (1958/2014) by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa is one of the pillars of the Italian canon. It is a historical novel in standard Italian which portrays Sicilian aristocracy and Italian society during the nineteenth-century revolutions for the unification

[29] "Fontanazza" is the name of a village near Chiaramonte Gulfi (Rabito's birthplace).
[30] The entry form completed by Giovanni is included in typescript B.
[31] In a primitive manner; by someone who cannot use a typewriter.

of Italy (the so-called "Risorgimento"). *Fontanazza* also offers insights into Sicilian and Italian society at a crucial historical moment but it does so "from below". Hence, the qualifier "popolare". The encomium also defined *Fontanazza* as "il capolavoro che non leggerete" (the masterpiece that you will never read) due to *rabitese*. Furthermore, just like Giovanni stated on the entry form, Rabito was described as someone who found it difficult to write and use the typewriter: "Rabito si arrampica sulla scrittura di sè per quasi tutto il Novecento, litigando con la storia e con la macchina da scrivere" ("La motivazione del premio del 2000" 2000: n.p.).

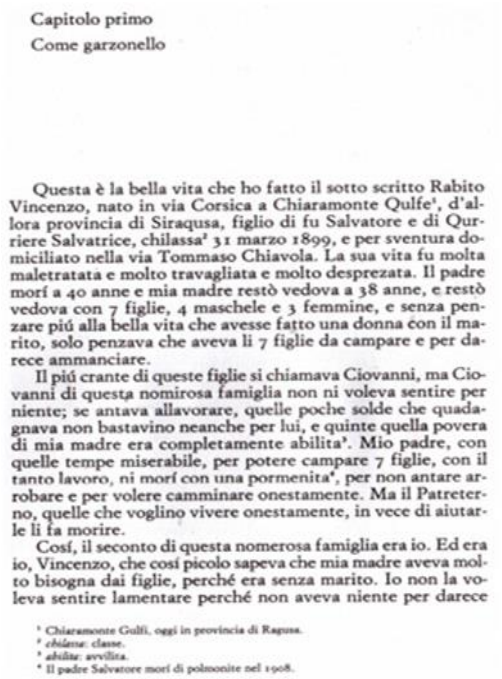
Soon after the award, the ADN, believing that *Fontanazza* deserved the recognition of a larger public, started to discuss how to make the text suitable for publication. Luca Ricci, who was then working at the ADN as Il Premio's artistic director, was tasked with the rewriting (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 255). Ricci had already edited texts held at the ADN and had worked alongside Tutino on an anthology of autobiographical writing on the Second World War (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 255). Contentwise, Ricci reduced the episodes recounted (from 532 to 233). His rationale was the elimination of repetitions and the preservation of the narrative flow. He also added a title – *Terra matta di Sicilia* –[32] and subdivided the typescript into twenty-two chapters, providing each with a title and paragraph indentations (2014: 257-256). Regarding *rabitese*, on the one hand, Ricci viewed it as the product of a "semi-literate writer" (2014: 258) for whom the typewriter was "an unfamiliar technology" (2014: 259). On the other, it was also, in his opinion, an original and expressive language worth preserving. Therefore, he decided to create a "philologically faithful text" that could be adapted by both mainstream and academic publishers (2014: 257). This meant preserving the mixture of Italian and Sicilian, adding numerous footnotes explaining lexical items and historical references, and highlighting suppressions and additions by putting them in square brackets (2014: 279). Exceptions were made for the layout, the punctuation and capital letters. These were normalised since, according to Ricci, they had been "randomly chosen" (2014: 257) and "carried no particular meaning" (2014:

[32] *That Crazy Land of Sicily*. "Terra matta" is a phrase taken from the typescript itself. It is spoken by a Venetian man during an altercation with Rabito (70). It is an insult aimed at Sicily and Sicilians and taps into preconceived ideas about people from Southern Italy. Southerners are often viewed as unreliable and dishonest. Both "Terra matta di Sicilia" and the final "Terra matta" can be said to reinforce these stereotypes.

248). However, Ricci did not add any diacritic signs (accents, apostrophes) (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 266-266).

In 2003, Ricci sent his rewriting to three publishing houses: Sellerio, Feltrinelli and Einaudi (Battaglia 2008: 3). Only Einaudi responded, indicating that they wanted to publish it after further editing by Evelina Santangelo, a Sicilian writer and Einaudi consultant. Like Ricci, Santangelo viewed Rabito as a semi-literate writer not familiar with the typewriter (2014: 261, 266) but she questioned Ricci's strictly philological approach since she believed it would alienate the reader (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 266). She therefore decided to remove the square brackets and to italicise words that were not present in the original. Like Ricci, she preserved the mixture of Italian and Sicilian as well as neologisms and spelling mistakes that did not hinder comprehension (2014: 261, 266). Santangelo kept Ricci's chapter breaks and his normalisation of punctuation since she concurred that it was "sostanzialmente casuale" (essentially random) (in Rabito 2007: vii). However, she added diacritic signs and shortened the title to *Terra matta*. Contentwise, she decided to eliminate "tortuous and convoluted" passages, to focus on "moments of expressive power" that highlighted Rabito's personality (2014: 262-263) and on sections that developed what Santangelo saw as the text's main structuring metaphor: the systematic search for a "home", understood as a physical dwelling place and as adaptation to new situations and surroundings (2014: 264-265).

The result of Ricci and Santangelo's editing is a book that, as far as page layout is concerned, adheres to normative practices. There are subdivisions into chapters and paragraphs, the margins and line spacing are regular and black ink is used throughout. Some of the features of *rabitese* have been preserved while others have disappeared. The editors have kept the mixture of Sicilian and Italian and spelling and grammatical anomalies that do not hinder comprehension. Rabito's idiosyncratic use of punctuation, capitals and diacritics have been erased and brought into line with standard use. The content, understood as narrative and storyline, has been heavily reduced but only to eliminate repetitions and ill-expressed passages.



Capitolo primo
Come garzonello

Questa è la bella vita che ho fatto il sotto scritto Rabito Vincenzo, nato in via Corsica a Chiaramonte Qulfe[1], d'allora provincia di Siraqusa, figlio di fu Salvatore e di Qurriere Salvatrice, chilassa[2] 31 marzo 1899, e per sventura domiciliato nella via Tommaso Chiavola. La sua vita fu molta maletratata e molto travagliata e molto desprezata. Il padre morí a 40 anne e mia madre restò vedova a 38 anne, e restò vedova con 7 figlie, 4 maschele e 3 femmine, e senza penzare piú alla bella vita che avesse fatto una donna con il marito, solo penzava che aveva li 7 figlie da campare e per darece ammanciare.

Il piú crante di queste figlie si chiamava Ciovanni, ma Ciovanni di questa nomirosa famiglia non ni voleva sentire per niente; se antava allavorare, quelle poche solde che quadagnava non bastavino neanche per lui, e quinte quella povera di mia madre era completamente abilita[3]. Mio padre, con quelle tempe miserabile, per potere campare 7 figlie, con il tanto lavoro, ni morí con una pormenita[4], per non antare arrobare e per volere camminare onestamente. Ma il Patreterno, quelle che voglino vivere onestamente, in vece di aiutarle li fa morire.

Cosí, il seconto di questa nomerosa famiglia era io. Ed era io, Vincenzo, che cosí picolo sapeva che mia madre aveva molto bisogna dai figlie, perché era senza marito. Io non la voleva sentire lamentare perché non aveva niente per darece

[1] Chiaramonte Gulfi, oggi in provincia di Ragusa.
[2] *chilassa*: classe.
[3] *abilita*: avvilita.
[4] Il padre Salvatore morí di polmonite nel 1908.

Figure 9 The first page of the Einaudi edition.[33]

The final result is a picaresque autobiographical narrative of upward social mobility. Camillo Langone has identified eleven different Italian locations and two continents in *Terra matta* (2007: 3). Rabito takes us from Chiaramonte Gulfi to the First World War trenches in northern Italy (where Rabito fought aged eighteen), Rome, Florence, Gorizia (an Italian city on the border between Italy and Slovenia), Ragusa (Sicily), Slovenia in the aftermath of the First World War, Libya – where Rabito unwittingly ended up as a Fascist "camicia nera" (Black Shirt) in 1935 – Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), where he spent three years (1938-1940) as a road builder to further Mussolini's colonial enterprise, and Germany during the Second World War.

Rabito starts off in Chiaramonte Gulfi as a "bracciante" at the mercy of landowners: "Che volete fare? Era ebica miserabile, che li padrone comantavino e l'operaie se dovevino mettere sempre solattente quanto parrava il padrone, *e l'operaio* non doveva parlare perché subito lo licenziavino, perché leggie non ci n'era" (9, Ricci and Santangelo's italics).[34]

[33] Source: Carbonelli (2017: n.p.)
[34] What was one to do? Those were wretched times, because the bosses were in charge and the peasants always had to be ready to obey when the boss spoke, and the peasant was not allowed to speak, because he would be fired just like that, because there were no laws back then.

As the narrative progresses, he never ceases to wrestle with the oppression of the powerful, of the "desonesta Padria" (the dishonest Fatherland) (63) and with what he calls "una mala praneta supra di me" (an ill-omened planet above me) (199). For instance, when he is called to fight in the First World War, Rabito is exploited and underpaid while his family is deprived of an income:

> E così, questa vita si ha fatto di antare immienzo alla neve per fina al mese di l'urtime di marzo. E lavoranto con uno puntiglio… *neanche* fossimo una ditta. Senza che nesuno ci pagava. Era la butana Madre Patria che ci doveva pagare con 12 soldi al ciorno e sanza darece un soldo alle famiglie che morevino di fame, comincianto di mia madre, che aveva 2 figlie, uno allo spedale ferito e io che da uno momente all'altro potevo morire. (62, Ricci and Santangelo's italics)[35]

When he decides to go to Abyssinia to support Mussolini's colonization of Africa, he is tricked by an army official into signing a contract which involves going to Libya as a "camicia nera" to fend off the British Fleet instead (186).

The tribulations that Rabito faces are also linked to his caustic mother-in-law and his unhappy marriage. Once he returns from Libya, Rabito manages to go to Abyssinia where he earns a sizeable amount of money (219). When he gets back to Chiaramonte Gulfi, he meets his future wife (Neduzza) and mother-in-law (Anna). With the complicity of an acquaintance of Rabito's (Pinuzzo Azara), Anna and Neduzza lead him to believe that Anna's siblings will help him secure a job and some land because they are all either educated and middle class, or members of the clergy:

[35] And so, up until the end of the month of March, we led that life, working deep in the snow. And we even worked with such precision… you'd think we were all professionals. Without ever getting paid. It was that whore of our Motherland who was supposed to pay us at least 12 pennies a day but she did not even give a penny to families that were starving, starting from my mother, who had 2 sons, one wounded in hospital and then myself who could have died any minute.

> Uno ene presete a Piazza Almerina, uno ene a Ravenna, che ene professore di cennastica, e uno ene domeicano, e poie c'ene una sua sorella che abita a Siraqusa, che ene moglie del cancigliere alla corte di assise di Siraqusa, e poie qui a Chiaramonte c'ene il figlio maestro. (227)[36]

The money that Rabito had earned in Africa had made him "imbriaco di nobilità" (drunk with dreams of nobility) (231). He, therefore, decides to marry Neduzza. Nevertheless, her siblings do not go to the wedding and, although, at first, they seem willing to help Rabito (232-233), after a while, they make it clear that they want nothing to do with either Anna, Neduzza or Rabito (236-237). To make matters worse, instead of wealth and social standing, Rabito finds debts, a mortgaged and derelict house (241-242), a wife subjugated to her mother and a domineering mother-in-law who verbally abuses Rabito's mother and who wishes Rabito dead because of a dispute over the house: "'Latro! Mi haie robato la mia mezza casa!' […] E poi me diceva: 'Ammazzato devo morire!'" (247).[37] The strife and bitterness between Neduzza, Anna and Rabito is so intense that Rabito describes their first meeting as the driving force behind his autobiography: "E quella fu la serata che mi ha fatto scrivere questo *libro*. […]. E a causa di quella sera […], io tutto questo veleno nella mia persona non l'avesse, perché si hanno finite tutte li miei speranze e si ha cozimato tutto il mio avenire" (225, Ricci and Santangelo's italics).[38]

Amidst these trials, Rabito manages to raise his social status. In his mid-twenties, together with his three brothers, he obtains a qualification as a "picconiere" and "minatore" (rock breaker and miner) as well as membership in their guild: "[C]osí siammo deventate operaie, non più condadine, e deventammo operaie specializate" (163).[39] Thanks to it, Rabito will work on the construction of railway lines (in Regabulto, Sicily) and roads (Abyssinia) (199) and in the German coal mines with his brother Paolo (252-253). Around

[36] One is headteacher at Piazza Armerina [in the city of Enna], one is in Ravenna, who is a P.E. teacher, and one is a Dominican, and there is a sister who lives in Siragusa, who is the wife of a clerk who works at the Court in Siragusa, and then here in Chiaramonte, there is a son who is a teacher.
[37] "You thief! You stole my half of the house from me!" […] Then she would say to me: "You deserve to be murdered!"
[38] And that was the evening that made me write this book. […]. Without that […] evening, I would not have all this poison in me, because they killed all my hopes, and they ruined all my future.
[39] So we became workers, no longer peasants, and we became skilled workers.

the age of forty, he will obtain a permanent position as a road-mender, which includes a house and a regular wage (310).

As Santangelo has argued, the narrative can be said to be structured by the trope of the "home", understood both as a physical dwelling place and as the development of connections with other people. Rabito tries to do up the derelict house inherited from his wife; when in Africa, he builds a hut out of branches and fuel tanks (198). Wherever he goes, he makes friends thanks to his storytelling skills (282) and the string band he had set up with his brothers (176-178; 222; 258). Rabito's search for a home culminates in the final chapters when he leaves Chiaramonte Gulfi and moves to Ragusa where, thanks to his savings, he buys a large modern house, the house in which he will compose the typescript and the second version of his autobiography.

Since the publication of *Terra matta*, the rewriting by Ricci and Santangelo has been praised for having given access to a text that was unreadable, without, however, erasing all its peculiarities. According to Domenico Scarpa, the editors "vanno ringraziati per un lavoro filologico non solo impeccabile ma anche affetuoso" (2007: 19).[40] Giuseppe Antonelli (writing for the periodical *Indice dei Libri del Mese*) has gone as far as conferring supernatural overtones on the rewriting. He has defined it as "*rabdomantica divinatio*" (rabdomantic mindreading/clairvoyance*)* (2007: 12, Antonelli's italics), which implies identity between the editors and Rabito and, by extension, between the rewriting and the typescript. This idea is pushed to the extreme on the dust jacket of the 2007 hardback edition which states that although *Terra matta* is an abridged version of the original, it is "esattamente come lui [Rabito] l'ha scritto, senza cambiare neppure una parola" (exactly as Rabito wrote it, without changing a single word).

The reception of *Terra matta* downplays the differences between typescript A and the rewriting by invoking great affection for the author, extrasensory mindreading gifts on part of the editors or by negating difference. On the one hand, these statements deter us from engaging with the rewriting and its relation to the typescript because they guarantee identity between the two. On the other hand, they are so counterintuitive that they make us wary of how critics present Rabito and his work. We need not be literary critics to

[40] They ought to be thanked for a philological work which is not only impeccable but also loving.

understand that Ricci and Santangelo are not Rabito and that *Terra matta* is not the typescript. These statements are an invitation to challenge the reception.

We encountered similar statements in section 4.1 where I highlighted the paradox of the illiterate writer and the copresence (sometimes within a single piece of criticism) of words which point simultaneously to illiteracy and a degree of literacy (e.g. "analfabeta" and "pressoché analfabeta"). I argued that these contradictions call for a reassessment of the typescript, *Terra matta* and Rabito. If we reconfigure Rabito's literacy proficiency, we can also reconfigure how we look at him as an author and at his work. In particular, we can start to envisage the typescript's peculiarities as deliberate stylistic choices, rather than random mistakes due to lack of schooling and the inability to use a typewriter. In the next section, I provide more examples of contradictions taken from the reception. I also discuss the article by the Italianist David Moss, who argues that critics and scholars have created a set of "mythical elements" (2014a: 328) which do not stand up to scrutiny and that Rabito may have been more familiar with literacy than critics would have it.

4.5 The reception before and after the publication: an "old" typewriter and a "primitive" peasant locked in a room

On II Premio entry form that Giovanni completed in 1999, Rabito was presented as someone who could not use a typewriter. His writing was described via words pointing to illiteracy ("scrittura primitiva"). When Rabito was awarded Il Premio in 2000, allusions to illiteracy and the inability to use a typewriter were reiterated. The typescript was also, as we saw, defined as a contribution to historiography and as a "*Gattopardo* popolare", which suggested that it was a masterpiece worth including in the canon. Ricci and Santangelo's rewriting is underpinned by similar ideas. For the editors, Rabito wrote a masterpiece but he made grammatical mistakes because he did not know linguistic norms and because the typewriter was an unfamiliar technology.

The Premio entry form, the encomium and the editors' note draw from each other and present Rabito in a similar way. On the one hand, they evoke characteristics associated not only with literacy but also with essay-text literacy (masterpiece, the canon, print). On the other, they negate them by evoking illiteracy (primitive writing, difficulty using writing technology and, therefore, backwardness). This creates instability in how we perceive

Rabito's literacy competence: he could be literate, even highly literate but also illiterate. However, since Rabito was a *bracciante,* an autodidact and used an ungrammatical language, he strongly evokes illiteracy.

The critical reception of *Terra matta* after its publication in 2007 adopts the template set by Giovanni, the encomium and the editors. Antonio Nicosia states that Rabito typed with "un solo dito" (with just one finger) (2008: 61), which suggests difficulties with writing and the typewriter. "Il piccolo museo del diario" (the ADN museum) has a room dedicated to Rabito and *Terra matta.* The room has a sonic background that reproduces the sound made by someone typing slowly with one finger. Wherever you are in the museum, you can hear this sound. Tano Gullo claims that Rabito would shut himself in a small room with a typewriter which he struggled to use (2006: n.p.). According to Paolo Mauri, Rabito composed his autobiography "chiuso a chiave in una stanza, affannandosi su una vecchia Olivetti" (locked in a room, typing on an old Olivetti with great difficulty) (2007: 48).

For Segio Luzzato and Silvia Ragusa, Rabito is an "inalfabeto" (illiterate) who wrote a history book. Luzzato, writing for *Il Corriere della Sera* (a major national newspaper), states that Rabito's memoir is a historian's dream come true: "A volte i sogni degli storici si avverano. Ed è un sogno avverato il libro che Einaudi ha mandato da poco in libreria" (2007: 49).[41] In *La Sicilia* (a regional newspaper), Ragusa quotes the words of Giuseppe Barone, professor of history at Catania university, who has claimed that *Terra matta* "ci rivela molto di più di tanti libri di storia" (*Terra matta* reveals more than many history books) (2008b: 13).

The parallel with *Il Gattopardo* made by the encomium is often cited (e.g. Langone 2007:3; Luzzato 2007: 49) but other parallels with the Italian canon and highly educated writers have been made. Rabito has been compared to the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga (Gullo 2006; Mauri 2007; Rigoni Stern 2007). In his fiction, Verga often uses Sicilian vocabulary and syntax in the speech and thoughts of characters from the lower classes. Further, one of Verga's most famous novels, *I Malavoglia* (1881/2005), echoes the content of *Terra matta. I Malavoglia* tells the story of a family of poor Sicilian fishermen and of their attempts at upward social mobility. Similarities with this novel are also alluded to by the

[41] Sometimes, historians' dreams come true. The book recently published by Einaudi which is now on sale in bookshops is a dream come true.

paratext of the 2008 paperback edition where the book is subtitled "una staordinaria epopea dei diseredati" (an extraordinary epic of the dispossessed).[42]

Tano Gullo has made a parallel with Luigi Pirandello and Andrea Camilleri, two Sicilian writers who use Sicilian dialect in their works (2006: n.p.). Paolo Mauri has compared Rabito to Folengo and il Ruzante, two fifteenth-century writers who wrote in Northern Italian dialects (2007: 48). However, both Gullo and Mauri are quick to play down their comparisons. For Gullo, Rabito had no literary aspirations and his memoir was just a means for remembering and being remembered: "[I]n Vincenzo Rabito non c'è alcuna velleità letteraria, ma solo la necessità di trovare dentro di sè uno strumento per scrivere le vicende, le emozioni, le conquiste e le delusion vissute" (2006: n.p.).[43] For Mauri, Rabito had no literary education and, consequently, no literary skills : "Ma qui [in *Terra matta*] non c'è mediazione d'autore, non c'è il letterato che dà forma ai dialetti e al parlar popolare" (2007: 48).[44]

In the criticism written after the publication, references to highly literate people and to people familiar with essay-text literacy coexist with references to low literacy and illiteracy. Since Rabito did not go to school, was poor and wrote in *rabitese,* illiteracy always has more traction than literacy and Rabito remains firmly anchored to it. However, if Rabito did not have any "velleità letteraria" (literary aspirations), as Gullo claims, why did he let Giovanni take the "quaterni" to Bologna with him? Second, if typing were such a struggle, why did he compose a revised version of his autobiography? Third, the typewriter is often described as "vecchia" (old) (Mauri 2007: 48; Pardini 2007: 34; Mugno 2008: 51), a word which reinforces illiteracy because it evokes backwardness. It must be noted that this definition is anachronistic in relation to the time of Rabito's writing. The typewriter used by Rabito belonged to Giovanni and was an "Olivetti Lettera 22" (Fragapane 2017: n.p.) which, in the 1970s, was the most modern and advanced writing technology available on the market. Fourth, Giovanni has confirmed that his father was coy about his work (2017: private correspondence; Moss 2014a: 329). Therefore, we can assume that he typed shut in

[42] This subtitle was removed in the 2014 edition probably because of a clash of genres. *I Malvoglia* is a work of fiction while *Terra matta* is an autobiography which is viewed as a historical document.
[43] In Vincenzo Rabito there is no literary aspirations, but only the need to find within himself an instrument for writing down the experiences, the emotions, the achievements and the disappointments that he went through.
[44] But, here [in *Terra matta*], there is no mediation, you do not have the highly educated man of letters who gives a shape to dialects and informal speech.

a room, away from prying eyes. (Intensive reading and writing are activities which are best done in a room of one's own). But, if this is really the case, how can we be sure he typed with one finger?

There are many details in the reception that emphasise illiteracy but that also raise questions about the real relation between Rabito and illiteracy. However, the reception of *Terra matta* is very uniform. Moreover, as pointed out in section 4.1, the instability produced by the copresence of allusions to literacy and illiteracy is ramparted by an aura of enigma, the literacy myth and an observable and long-standing correlation between illiteracy, the lower classes and Southern Italy. As a result, it is difficult to challenge it. Nevertheless, there is one dissenting voice. In an article entitled "The Creation of Value: *Terra matta* in Anthropological Perspective" (2014a), David Moss questions the idea that Rabito was an illiterate and backward peasant by drawing from *Terra matta* and extra-textual evidence about Rabito himself.

The main aim of Moss's article is to illustrate the dynamics whereby *Terra matta* and Rabito have accumulated cultural and symbolic capital. Moss traces this to contacts with prestigious institutions such as the ADN, Il Premio Pieve, Einaudi and high-profile literary figures. All the editions of the book, for instance, bear appreciative comments by the Sicilian author Andrea Camilleri: "Cinquant'anni di storia italiana patiti e raccontati con straordinaria forza narrativa. Un manuale di sopravvivenza involontario e miracoloso" (2014a: 323).[45] At the same time, Moss alerts us to the creation of a "mythology" (2014a: 317, 326-328) about Rabito and his work, that is, a set of ideas which do not stand up to scrutiny.

He argues that the peritext (dustjacket, covers, publisher's notes) of all the Einaudi editions contain information and elements whose purpose is more to frame Rabito "as [a] culturally deprived, illiterate or at best semi-literate, who worked as a […] peasant" (Moss 2014a: 326) than to provide objective knowledge. The peritext states that the composition of the typescript took seven years (1968-1975). However, Giovanni has rectified this information. In 2008, he claimed that Rabito composed the typescript in "tre o massimo, quattro anni" (three or four years at the outside), that is, between 1968 and 1971 (Giovanni Rabito 2008: n.p.; Moss 2014a: 326). As Moss has pointed out, a shorter time span increases

[45] Half a century of Italian history endured and narrated with extraordinary storytelling power. An unwitting and prodigious survival manual.

Rabito's "average daily productivity" (Moss 2014: 326). This undercuts both the idea that typing was a struggle and allusions to his illiteracy. Moreover, the front cover features the black and white photograph of an elderly man sitting at a kitchen table in front of a chipped enamel saucepan. The man has a sad expression, the kitchen is scantily furnished, the walls are bare and whitewashed and reminiscent of a farmhouse. The photograph evokes poverty, life in rural areas and, therefore, also lack of schooling. As Moss has noted, the man could easily be taken to represent Rabito himself or someone like him. The photograph, therefore, has us envision the author as a "a solitary, oppressed figure, wrestling with his lack of literacy skills to try to describe his life" (Moss 2014a: 328).

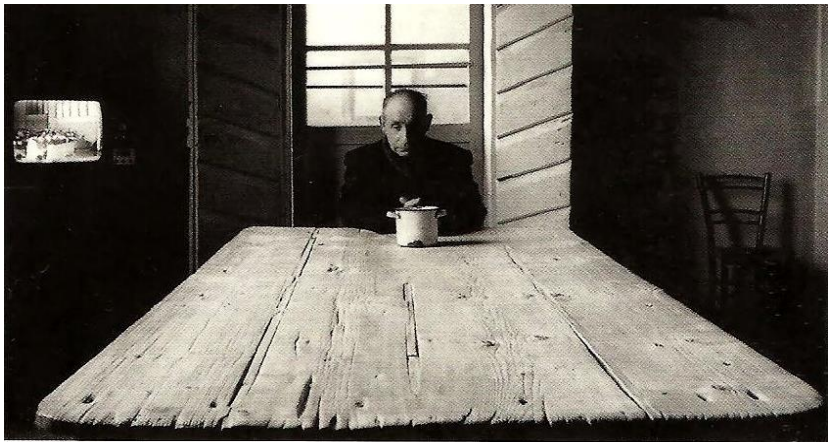


Figure 10 The photograph on the cover of *Terra matta: Solo*, 1969 (©Mario Lasalandra).

Moss argues that such a portrayal is misleading because it contradicts information provided by Giovanni and how Rabito represents himself in *Terra matta*. In *Terra matta*, Rabito starts off as a peasant living in the countryside, but when he reaches the age of the man in the photograph, he is living in the city. We also learn that he was very gregarious and sociable and that he worked mainly as a road-mender, a job that enabled him to buy a modern house for his retirement in the city of Ragusa (Moss 2014a: 327). In a 2008 speech, Giovanni claimed that, after his retirement, Rabito kept handwritten diaries with details of his daily activities for twenty years (in Moss 2014a: 328). From his second autobiography, we learn that "he took on the role of letter-writer on behalf of an illiterate fellow-soldier who wanted to keep contact with a fiancée during the First World War" (Moss 2014a: 328).

This information suggests that reading and writing were not a gruelling effort but a practice that Rabito had integrated into his daily life and that he pursued with relish and confidence.

Moss also highlights several representations of literacy and language acquisition in *Terra matta* itself:

> At the front he read letters from his mother (74) and recalls the satisfaction of arriving in Florence in 1920 as a soldier to find an electric light beside his bed to allow him to read the newspaper (136). In Africa he read Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* and probably others from the box of novels left for his work-crew to pass the time when they all fell ill (211). Furthermore, *Terra matta* contains considerable evidence for the extent of his writing as well as reading. He was already composing letters to a girlfriend and his mother during his time at the front (130-131, 134); he wrote regularly to his mother, less regularly to his wife, from Germany in 1941 (257); and, much later, when his adult sons were away from home, he was a frequent correspondent with them. […] (368-369, 387). (2014a: 327-328)

Moss, here, highlights sections of the literacy narrative of *Terra matta* which I will discuss in the next section. On the basis of these representations, or of this literacy narrative, Moss argues that the widespread idea that Rabito was illiterate/semi-literate "greatly underestimates his experience of the technology of writing and his familiarity with newspapers, letters and diaries" (2014a: 327). Put differently, for Moss, Rabito can be viewed more as literate than illiterate.

Moss provides further evidence of Rabito's familiarity with literacy by means of extra-textual evidence about Rabito's handwriting. Giovanni has claimed that, aside from the seven "quaterni" and the second autobiography, Neduzza (Rabito's wife) threw away all of Rabito's handwritten material (and the Olivetti typewriter) because she hated everything that Rabito did (in Fragapane 2017: n.p.). Nevertheless, a few examples of his handwriting remain. Thanks to Rabito's eldest son Turiddo, Moss has viewed the covers of the volumes

of the unpublished autobiography (Moss 2017: private correspondence). These have labels with a few handwritten words on them, such as “primo libro” (first book) and “guerra” (war) (Moss 2017: private correspondence). In his article, Moss describes his findings as follows:

> Examples of his handwriting confirm what the evidence of letter-writing implies: his ability to write legible cursive Italian (rather than separated capital letters, often a sign of limited writing skills), to spell correctly words that usually appear incorrectly in *Terra matta* and to use standard forms of punctuation appropriately (Moss 2014: 328)

Other examples of Rabito’s handwriting can be found in the typescript. During my visit at the ADN in April 2017, I examined typescript B page by page and found pieces of marginalia which match Moss’s findings. The marginalia are written in cursive and do not have interpuncts after every word. Further, they paraphrase the main body without grammatical errors (see Figures 11 and 12). The marginalia in Figure 11 read “così ha fatto quell guerra” (so he went to fight in that war) and are the paraphrase of “lo anno; chiamato; per soldato” (he was enlisted as soldier) in the main body. The marginalia in Figure 12 show a correction of the typescript itself. The phrase “la; testo; tredotta;” in the body of the typescript is partly crossed out and rendered as “la; stessa; tredotta;” (the same military troop train). Just below, Rabito provides another correction which reads “lo stesso treno” (the same train). In both corrections, Rabito shows an awareness of the correct usage of noun-adjective agreement, punctuation and synonyms. This challenges not only the view that he was illiterate/semi-literate but also that he wrote in a primitive manner and instinctually. Furthermore, it challenges the idea that Rabito did not know grammatical rules and the norms of punctuation.

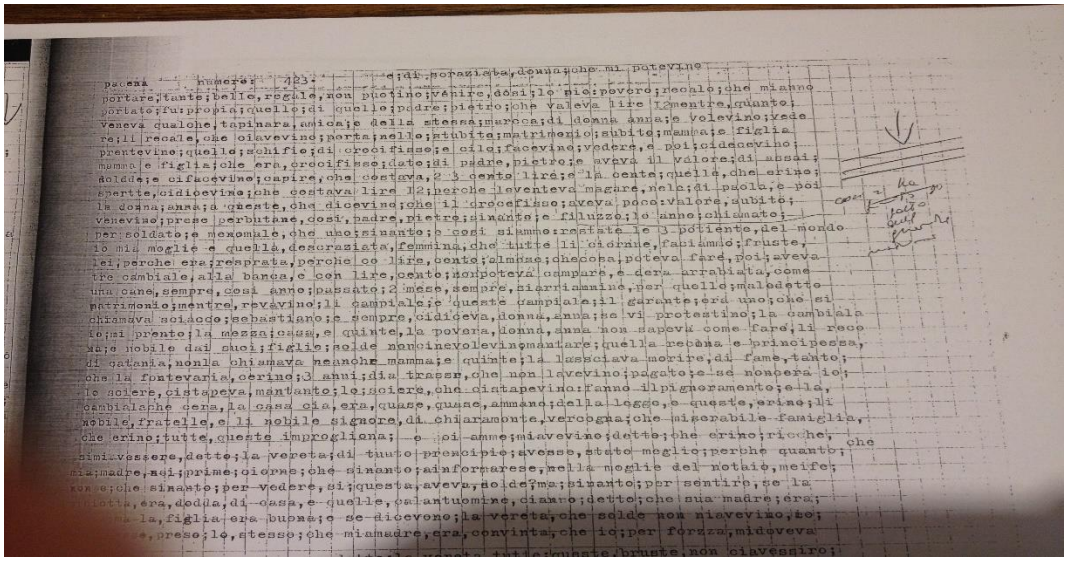


Figure 11 Marginalia in cursive which read "così ha fatto quell guerra"

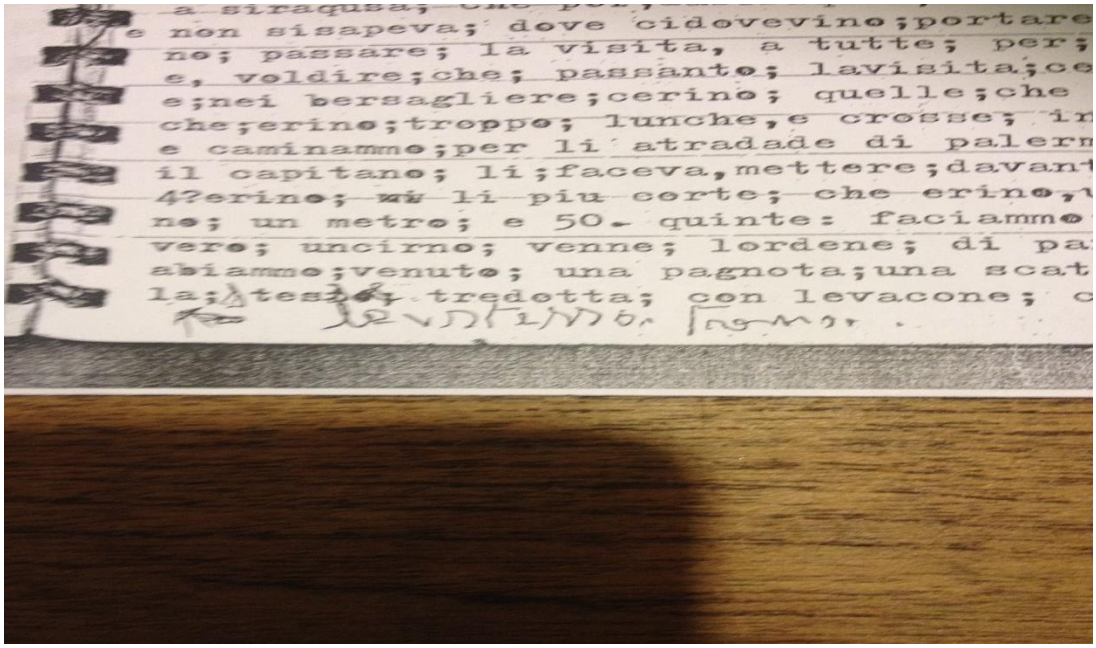


Figure 12 Marginalia in cursive which read "lo stesso treno".

Giovanni himself, in reply to an email where I asked him to describe his father's handwriting, claims that this was different from the style of the typescript:

> Il suo handwriting era graficamente molto più ordinato e soprattutto più in "italiano" del battuto a macchina, l'interpunzione molto più regolare, la frase più scorrevole e piana etc etc me lo ricordo benissimo dalle lettere che mi scriveva, certo è sempre la scrittura di

> uno che non è stato a scuola, quindi improvvisa e scorretta … con la macchina da scrivere succede invece una specie di rivoluzione, dovuta prima di tutto allo strumento tecnico più sofisticato, poi alla posizione decisamente creativa davanti alla quale si viene trovando nello scrivere la sua vita "come romanzo" … cioè si sente più scrittore e quindi cerca lo stile, l'espressione, e li trova inventandosi pian piano una sua lingua personale. (2017: private correspondence)[46]

Giovanni, here, corroborates the conclusions that both Moss and I have drawn by examining Rabito's handwriting: Rabito was more familiar with grammar, standard Italian and the conventions of prose writing that the reception suggests. Further, here, Giovanni does not frame the typewriter as a technology which Rabito could not use as he did on Il Premio entry form. He suggests instead that his father saw himself as a writer with his own distinctive style and literary aspirations.

In his article, Moss concludes that Rabito's use of punctuation was "certainly a deliberate choice rather than the unavoidable consequences of ignorance" (2014a: 330) and that comparisons between the typescript and other literary traditions such as the Italian Neoavanguardia "would lift Rabito's text out of the narrow confines of the literature of the *diversamente colti* [differently educated] and add further to its value". However, he also stresses that answers regarding the typescript "can only be speculative: Vincenzo Rabito and his friends are long dead and he did not discuss his writing with his sons" (2014a: 329). Put differently, since there are no first-hand witnesses, we will always remain in the dark about why Rabito typed in the way that he did.

I both agree and disagree with Moss's conclusions. I agree because there is textual and extra-textual evidence that suggests that Rabito was familiar with normative literacy practices and, therefore, that the typescript's idiocrasies are deliberate stylistic choices. Concerning comparisons with the Italian Neoavanguadia (or other movements), they may

[46] His handwriting was more grammatically correct and, above all, more in standard Italian than the typed, the punctuation much more regular, the syntax was clearer and less convoluted etc. I remember it vividly from the letters he sent me. Of course, it is always the writing of someone who had not been to school, therefore, jerky and incorrect … with the typewriter, there is a kind of revolution, due to, first of all, a more sophisticated writing instrument, and due to the creative role in which he found himself when started to write down his life "as a novel" … in other words, he feels more like a writer and, therefore, he looks for the right style, the right expression, which he indeed finds by inventing, step by step, a language all of his own.

outline similarities with other writers and set antecedents whom Rabito may have tried to emulate. I disagree because answers about the meaning of literary texts are always, to a certain extent, "speculative". From the standpoint of contemporary literary theory and criticism, authorial intention is difficult to pin down (even when the author is alive) since the author is never fully in control of it. However, this should not deter us from interpreting texts. A reliable interpretation can be achieved by combining historical contextualisation with a theoretical framework specifically geared to the topic addressed. Furthermore, *Terra matta* contains a literacy narrative and literacy narratives can become epistemological tools about language acquisition and literacy provided they are addressed via the literacy narrative approach. The literacy narrative approach is based on the premise that language acquisition and literacy are "plural", ideological and embedded in history. This approach works with a very broad and situated conceptualisation of these phenomena. As a result, when applied to *Terra matta*'s literacy narrative, it can shed some light on how Rabito practised literacy and how he viewed himself in relation to it. This, in turn, can help us make sense of the typescript's idiosyncrasies. Moss has already highlighted some aspects of *Terra matta*'s literacy narrative. However, there are others and they are discussed below.

4.6 Terra matta's literacy narrative: a resourceful learner familiar with essay-text literacy and foreign languages

Literacy narratives can take different forms. They can be either central to the main narrative or "strands of narrative possibility" (1992: 512), that is, patterns of representations ancillary to the main narrative. In *Terra matta*, Rabito focusses primarily on the injustice that he had to endure because of his social class, on his participation in important historical events and on his disastrous marriage. Representations of literacy and language acquisition are important but sporadic. Therefore, the book is best described as an autobiography with a literacy narrative running through it. Put differently, the literacy narrative is a subgenre imbricated within autobiography.

Rabito's literacy narrative commences very early on and frames the beginning and the end of the book. At the outset of Chapter 1, Rabito defines himself as "inafabeto"

(illiterate) because he did not go to school: "Io era piccolo ma era pieno di coraggio, con pure che invece di anatare alla scuola sono antato allavorare da 7 anne, che restaie completamente inafabeto".[47] A paragraph later, Rabito further stresses his status as illiterate because of lack of schooling:

> Che brutta vita che io faceva! […] mia sorella aveva 7 anne e antava alla scuola, ma con con quelle miserabile tempe, il desonesto coverno non dava neanche un centesimo per potere comperare uno quaterno, perché voleva che tutte le povere fossemo *inafabeto,* così io questo lo capeva. Pure, poi, il desonesto coverno che comantava non dava maie asegne, e dovevamo stare per forza non *inafabeto* solo, ma magare molte di fame. (Rabito 2007: 4, my italics) [48]

We will encounter this word once more towards the end of the book, when Rabito's wife (Neduzza), to demean Rabito, accuses him of being "inafabeto" and "uno che non aveva camminato mai" (someone who had never walked, a loser who never achieved anything) (357).

These passages make it difficult to challenge the view that Rabito was illiterate since Rabito is both the author and the narrator of the book and, therefore, can control how he describes himself. However, there are differences between these citations. In the first, Rabito clearly declares himself to be illiterate because of lack of formal education but, in the second, he is illustrating the literacy-based tactics implemented by the Italian government to keep the lower classes illiterate and the social structure intact. He is, in other words, explaining the viewpoint of the government and of the powerful. In the third quotation, Rabito is expressing his wife's viewpoint and the extent to which "illiterate" can be used derogatorily. The word "inafabeto", therefore, is less an accurate index of Rabito's literacy proficiency than a reflection of how he was perceived by others. Furthermore, we must bear

[47] I was just a child but I was so brave! On top of everything, instead of going to school, I went to work when I was 7, so I remained completely illiterate.
[48] What a hard and unjust life mine was! […] my sister was 7 years old and went to school, but in those miserable days, the dishonest government didn't give you a single penny to buy school notebooks, because it wanted all the poor to remain illiterate. And also, the dishonest government that ruled never gave you any money, so we not only had to remain illiterate, but, maybe, even, starve.

in mind that "inafabeto" is an invented word and that Rabito sometimes merged words together. Therefore, we cannot be sure that its signified is "illiterate". Could this word be the result of the fusion of "in" and "alfabeto" (alphabet) and mean "someone who would like to be immersed in the alphabet but cannot"? Understood in this way, "inafabeto" speaks of literary aspirations and of a flair for print which cannot be fulfilled because, historically, literacy has been the privilege of a few.

Tellingly, between these allusions to illiteracy, Rabito interpolates representations which foreground facility with reading, writing, print material and essay-text literacy. At the age of fifteen, Rabito taught himself to read and write and to count by studying his sister's schoolbooks:

> Cosí io, quanto vedeva il libro di mia sorella che antava alla scuola, mi veneva la voglia di cominciare a fare "a, i, u". Quinte, cercava di ampararеme qualche vocale e li numira. E cosí, piano piano, quanto una volta ho fatto un nume di ummio compagno di lavoro che si chiamava Vivera, e io, quanto sono state capace di affare "Vivera", mi parso che avesse preso il terno! E cosí, piano piano, senza essere prodetto di nessuno, fra poche mese mi sono imparato a capire cosa vuol dire la scuola and conoscire li numira.
>
> E cosí, leceva il gironale, e cosí cominciaie a capire quanto soldate morevino nella querra, che più va, più aspra si faceva la querra. (15)[49]

The literacy narrative moves very fast here. Rabito goes from learning the alphabet and basic arithmetic to reading the newspaper and extracting detailed information about the war. Rabito's learning curve is likely to have been more uneven. This oversimplification

[49] So, every time I saw my sister's book, who was going to school, I really wanted to sound out "a, i, u". I wanted to learn a few vowels and the numbers by myself. And so, little by little, when, one day, I worked out how to spell the name of a workmate of mine called Vivera, and I, when I figured out how to write "Vivera", I felt like I had become the richest man in the world! And so, little by little, without teachers, in a few months I taught myself what going to school means and to count.

And so, I would read the newspaper, and so I began to understand how many soldiers were dying in the war, and the more it went on, the more it was deadly, the war.

resembles Rodriguez's description of his journey from the "kingdom of sounds" to that of words and can be viewed as an effect of the genre of autobiography. As explained in Chapter 2, autobiography does not offer unmediated access to the author's life. Rather, it is a genre "governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture" (de Man 1979: 920-921). What we read in an autobiography is different from the author's life because autobiography is mediated by the semiotic mode used (language), has its own conventions and is a means of self-invention (rather than self-revelation). Rabito may have condensed his progress to keep up with the picaresque pace of the text and because the literacy narrative is a subgenre and, therefore, has a secondary role.[50]

From this point onwards, Rabito recursively stresses his flair not just for literacy but for essay text-literacy. As Moss has pointed out, Rabito is a keen newspaper reader and he is delighted when, arriving in Florence in 1920 as a soldier, he finds an electric light by his bed: "[*O*]*ra avevo invece* una bellissema rite di ferro e una lampadina, nella camerata, che con la luce elettrica si poteva leggere il giornale" (136, Ricci and Santangelo's italics).[51] When he is in Africa to further Mussolini's colonial project, he falls ill and, to pass the time, he reads *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Dumas. Since there is no electricity and he wants to read at night too, he makes a "candle" with a bottle and some oil: "E così, alla note, teneva questa cantela acesa e liggeva questo romanzo di Monte Cristo, e la notata pasava presto (211).[52] We also know that he read "[i]l libro dell'Opra dei pupe della storia dei palatine di Francia, e il libro del Querino il Meschino" (181).[53] Concerning writing, Moss has noted that Rabito would write (and receive) letters when he was in Germany to work in the coal mines (257) and during his time at the front (130-131, 134).

[50] The way in which Rabito represents his learning experiences corroborates how Aneta Pavlenko (a representative of the "language learner approach") describes "language memoirs" written in the early twentieth century. Pavlenko argues that they do not provide detailed descriptions of the affective consequences of language learning and that they concentrate on "cultural assimilation, 'marrying in', and appropriation of material benefits" (Pavlenko 2001a: 216).

[51] And now, instead, I had the nicest sprung bed base and a light bulb, in the dormitory, so with electric light one could read the newspaper.

[52] And so, by night, I kept this candle lit and I read this novel about Monte Cristo and the night went by quickly.

[53] The book about the puppets' exploits which is about the story of the French paladins and the book about the wretched Guerin.

The former is a book of chivalric adventures by Giusto Lo Dico published, a nineteenth-century Sicilian writer. This book has inspired a puppet show regularly performed in the streets of Sicily (Moss 2014a: 319-320). The second is a 1410 picaresque and fantastical novel by Andrea da Barberino (Moss 2014a: 319).

Throughout his autobiography, Rabito also stresses his ability to harness essay-text literacy for social advancement. During a seasonal job as a tomato picker, he understands that the peasant who can drive the tractor is more highly regarded and better paid than him. He therefore buys a second-hand manual from a mechanic and, over two Sundays, he teaches himself how to drive a tractor (172). When the tractor driver falls ill, Rabito replaces him and gets a better wage. At the age of thirty, Rabito applies for a job as a road mender. A compulsory requirement for this position is the "licenza di quinta elementare", a qualification given to children on completion of primary school and of an exam which includes reading and writing standard Italian and arithmetic (181-182). Rabito decides to sit the exam as an autodidact. As he already knows to read and write, Rabito focusses on mathematics. He borrows a book from a secondary school teacher (Sceverio Nicastro) and teaches himself primary arithmetic: "Così, luie [Nicastro] mi ha dato un librio di mitemedica, e io, per 10 giorni, facento nomera, che stavo tutte li 10 ciorne dentro a fare moltiplicazione, divisione e adezione …" (182).[54] Rabito passes the exam, which, for him, is a "dream": "Così, alle 10 ciorne, fu ura di fare l'esame, e fui stato promosso. Vincenzo Rabito a 30 anne, senza antare alla scuola, ebi la fortuna di avere la 5 elimentare, che mi pareva un sogno" (182).[55]

A detail which is always overlooked by critics and which foregrounds Rabito's status as literate is his ability to transfer the skills developed when learning Italian to the acquisition of foreign languages. Thanks to his first girlfriend, a Slovenian girl called Francesca, Rabito learns some written and spoken Slovenian (131). When working in Germany in the coal mines, Rabito and his brother Paolo realise that without any German they cannot become team supervisors. They, therefore, make German acquisition their priority. To maximise their learning, they socialise only with Germans. Moreover, they buy and study "un libro che era di lingua tidesca e di lingua italiana: però il primo volume, che era come quello delle piciridde della prima elementare, che spiagava magare la prinonzia" (253).[56] Soon after, Rabito meets a secondary school German teacher who can speak both Italian and Sicilian. The teacher offers to give Rabito, Paolo, and their friend Vito, German

[54] So, he [Nicastro] gave me a maths book, and I, for 10 days, did maths, because I stayed at home for 10 whole days, doing multiplying, dividing and adding.
[55] And so, after 10 days, it was time to sit the exam, and I passed it. Vincenzo Rabito at 30, without going to school, had the privilege to get "la licenza di quinta elementare", which seemed like a dream to me.
[56] A book that was in German and in Italian: but it was the first volume, the one for little children who have just begun primary school, but, in it, you even had the pronunciation.

tuition in exchange for conversation in Sicilian. Rabito and Paolo will go the German teacher's house every evening for "circa 70 ciorne" (257).[57] Vito, however, will not follow them because "Vito, invece, lecire and scrivere non ni sapeva e non c'importava tanto, poi che magare aveva 4 figlie di campare e non penzava il parlare tedesco" (257). [58]

The literacy narrative just outlined stands in stark contrast to the idea that Rabito was an illiterate/semi-literate. If, for Rabito, literacy had been a gruelling effort, he would not have bought a tractor manual. He would have asked someone to *show* him how to drive a tractor. In *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*, Victoria Purcell-Gates argues that people with low literacy living in literate societies rely more on oral communication with others, bodily gestures and other semiotic modes (e.g. colour, image) (1997: 60) to compensate for their difficulties with literacy. The same applies to how he learned German. Rabito would have not bought a bilingual primer but relied on oral communication with other Germans. Furthermore, through Vito's characterisation, Rabito differentiates between different levels of literacy proficiency and suggests that his status was *not* that of an illiterate. Although we cannot know the exact level of either Rabito's or Vito's literacy proficiency, Rabito frames Vito as illiterate ("lecire and scrivere non ni sapeva"/"he didn't know how to read and write") and distances himself from him by tracing his "illiteracy" to the pressure of more immediate needs (e.g. food and money for his family) and to a lack of interest in literacy and German.

If we compare Rabito to Vito, we can reassess the status of Rabito as a learner and as a literate person. Rabito was certainly born poor and did not go to school, but, overall, he had a flair for reading and writing and understood the dynamics of the "linguistic market" (Bourdieu 1982/1991: 54). Most importantly, he had what Deborah Brandt calls "sponsors of literacy" (1998/2001). "Sponsors of literacy" are people, institutions, monetary funds and material objects that facilitate and make literacy instruction possible. Although Rabito did not receive any formal education, he lived in a household where school primers circulated thanks to his sister who went to school. Without his sister's primers, it would have been more difficult for Rabito to nurture his interest in literacy. He also had money to buy print material (newspapers, the tractor manual, the German primer) and he knew teachers (the

[57] Around 70 days

[58] Vito, on the other hand, reading and writing, he could not do it and he was not bothered because he had four children to feed and he did not think about learning German.

German professor, Nicastro) who gave him books and tuition.[59] These sponsors enabled him to fulfil his personal inclinations and to put into practice what he had understood about the linguistic market. By differentiating between himself and Vito, Rabito suggests that his level was certainly not that of an illiterate and closer to that of one familiar with essay-text literacy.

Although Rabito suggests that he was familiar with essay-text literacy, in *Terra matta*, he never explicitly describes himself as literate. In Italian, the word "literate", is usually rendered via "colto" and "istruito" (learned, educated), two words which evoke institutionalised learning and membership in the middle/upper class. At the time of his writing, the connotations of "colto" and "istruito" were reinforced by observable realities. Although, in Italy, primary school became compulsory in 1859, until the Second World War, for the poor and the working class, schooling and literacy were the exception rather than the rule. Child labour and the scarcity of basic needs such as clothing were insurmountable obstacles which prevented attendance (Genovesi 2010: 87-80). The infrastructures themselves were often inadequate to cater for, and to appeal to, prospective pupils:

> Emerge chiaramente "il quadro drammatico di un paese povero ed incolto dove il pane è nemico dell' alfabeto ed il lavoro infantile spopola le pur poche e malfunzionanti scuole" (Tomasi 1982b, p. 128). Gli utenti della scuola popolare sono quindi bambini, miseri e stracciati, impediti da più cause a una regolare frequenza, che finivano dunque per avere, anche frequentando, una "precaria esposizione scolastica". (Genovesi 2010: 91) [60]

At the time of Rabito's writing, literacy and, in particular, essay-text literacy were still a "clubby habitus" (Bourdieu in Brockmeier and Olson 2009: 3), that is, a privilege of the upper and middle class.

[59] Giovanni, who was a poet, and the Olivetti typewriter can also be viewed as Rabito's "sponsors of literacy".
[60] What emerges is "a dramatic picture of a poor and uneducated country where your daily bread was the alphabet's enemy and child labour depopulated the already few and malfunctioning schools" (Tomasi 1982b, p. 128). Schools' users were, therefore, children, poor and in rags, who ended up having "a precarious exposure to schooling" even if they decided to attend.

These dynamics are represented in *Terra matta.* Rabito reproduces the link between class and literacy by "regionalising of literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 1992: 523). Rabito subdivides people into two categories: the "tipo colleggiale" (the schooled, genteel type) and the "tipo campagniolo" (the rural, peasant-like type) (25). Rabito identifies with this latter while he associates the "tipo colleggiale" with the wealthy. When Rabito decides to marry Neduzza to fulfil his dreams of "nobility", he infers that she comes from a wealthy family because her siblings and/or their spouses have jobs that require proficiency in essay-text literacy: headteacher, P.E. teacher, Dominican friar, Court clerk, teacher (227). For Rabito, literacy implies middle-class status and vice versa.

The link between the middle class and literacy is so strong that it even overrides gender distinctions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, access to literacy and, in particular, to essay-text literacy, has always been more difficult for women than for men (Graff 1987: 26-27; 250; 256; Van Holthoon 2009: 435-436). In *Terra matta*, representations of women tend to reproduce stereotypes. Aside from Rabito's Slovenian girlfriend, women are either sanctified (Rabito's mother [261]), demonised (Rabito's mother-in-law [225]) or sexualised (2, 5, 12). But as far as literacy is concerned, their representation is more balanced: women can be equal to men provided they belong to the middle class. The nurses of the hospital in which Rabito ends up during the First World War were "figlie di cente ricca, volontarie e commolta scuola" (volunteers, daughters of rich people, and with lots of schooling) (42). When he meets Neduzza's sister for the first time, Rabito concludes that she must have a university degree because she addresses him in standard Italian and not Sicilian: "E quanto parlava italiano comme, *questa sorella* mi faceva capire che era lauriata magare leie" (233, Ricci's and Santangelo's italics).[61]

The passages just discussed suggest that Rabito does not explicitly self-define as literate because, due to his socioeconomic background, he did not fit neatly into empirically verifiable realities. However, *Terra matta* offers another explanation. For Rabito, the "tipo colleggiale" is untrustworthy. Neduzza's siblings are defined as "improgliona acente" (deceitful people) and, paradoxically, as "inaffabeto" (a variation of inafabeto/illiterate) because they do not help Rabito find a job as agreed before the wedding:

[61] And when she spoke Italian with me, this sister made me think that maybe she had a degree just like the others [her brothers].

> E così, io ci faceva scrivire lettre a mia moglie. E mi dicevino: "voggie", "domane", "sempre"… E io stave sempre con quella maledetta speranza, con queste improgliona acente che dicevino che erino signore, ma erino peccio di uno vedano inaffabeto, che piú assaie ci scriveva piú disoneste erino. (255)[62]

Rabito describes the wealthy literate as illiterate because this word has negative connotations and ties in with the notion of deceit and dishonesty. We can conclude, therefore, that Rabito did not use the word "literate" to describe himself for two reasons. First, doing this ran against the grain of the link that history has forged between literacy, education and the middle/upper class. Second, Rabito associated the literate wealthy with negative characteristics which he did not want to share. When describing himself in relation to literacy, Rabito was working with a language that lacked a vocabulary that accounted for his language learning experiences and his views on literacy and illiteracy. In the next section, I argue that Rabito compensated for this lack by using the materiality of the typescript and its multimodality.

4.7 The typescript as a multimodal literacy narrative[63]

So far, the reception has approached the typescript principally as a text made of words to be read. The phrase "il capolavoro che non leggerete" (the masterpiece that you will never read) made popular by the encomium and the erasure of the ubiquitous semicolon sum up the extent to which the mode of writing has had precedence over other aspects of the typescript. Although the typescript is made up of words, it is also a multimodal object that consists of image and plasticity (3D forms) and that can be defined as "synesthetic" because it engages various senses at once. The seven "quaderni" strike us visually because their

[62] And so, I would get my wife to write letters to them. And they would say to me: "today", "tomorrow", "always"… And I would always keep that cursed hope, because of these dishonest people who saw themselves as lords, but they were worse than a true illiterate because the more we wrote to them, the more dishonest they were.

[63] The following discussion is based on typescript A

materiality was modified by Rabito who bound them with string as if they were books. When we start to turn the pages, our eyes are immediately drawn to the semicolons. There are so many semicolons and they are so oddly placed that there is no need to read the typescript to notice them. As we turn the pages, we also notice the indentations left by the typebars of the typewriter. The words are "etched" onto the paper and can be felt through touch (see Figure 13). The etching, in turn, reifies before our eyes and in our minds the writing technology used by Rabito – the Olivetti Lettera 22. Moreover, through the etching and touch, we envision the shape of the letters that form the words of typescript. The etching, in other words, highlights the visual and plastic aspect of writing.

Figure 13 A photograph of the typescript showing the "etching" left by the typebars, 2009 (©Luigi Burroni).

When we approach a sign multimodally, it is, of course, important to identify the semiotic modes involved. As explained above, the typescript brings together writing, image and plasticity. Alongside this, the critic can make use of the analytics of "salience" and "interest". "Salience" refers to the modes which are emphasised in the representation, the modes that carry the most semantic weight (Kress 1997: 134; Kress 2003: 4; Van Leeuwen 2006: 144; Jewitt and Kress 2008: 11). Implied in this concept is the idea that interpretation should take the most salient mode as its starting point. "Interest" refers to the factors and reasons that led the sign-maker (Rabito in this case) to produce a certain sign/artefact.

Interest denotes simultaneously individual expression, authorial intention and social conditioning (Kress 1997: 89-90). In Kress's own words: "Interest is a composite of my experience; but it also a reflection of my present place, and an assessment of my present environment. With my experience – whether as a 5-year-old or a 55-year-old – I stand here now, in a social place" (1997: 90). Interest can be defined as the interaction between social determinism and individual creativity.

When we approach the typescript to establish which mode is the most salient, we are faced with a dilemma. Because of the sheer quantity of pages and words, writing is the most salient. Nevertheless, the typescript is extremely difficult to read. As Kress has argued, writing and, by extension, reading rest on the "affordances" of sequentiality and temporality (2003: 4-5, 45). In other words, to make sense of a written text, I must follow the order in which words appear, an operation which takes place in time. (2003: 4-5). The peculiarities of *rabitese* deter us from doing this because *rabitese* is an invented language which disregards the conventions of print. Significantly, there are very few people who have read the typescript in its entirety: Giovanni, Ricci and Santangelo and, maybe, the reading group. Even the judges of Il Premio Pieve "confessed that they had been unable to read more than a few pages" (Ricci and Santangelo 2014: 254). Nevertheless, if we consider the typescript as an image to be looked at and a 3D form to be touched, these problems of comprehension disappear. Image and plasticity/3D forms are "space-based modes" (Kress 2003: 45) which rest on the affordance of simultaneity. In an image and a 3D object, all the elements needed to make meaning are "simultaneously present" (Kress 2003: 45-46). I do not need to spend days reading, all the elements needed to interpret can be apprehended at a glance and "at a touch". This suggests that the typescript is not just a text to be read via words but also a text to be looked at (image) and to be touched (plasticity, 3D form). Writing, therefore, is the most salient mode insofar as we make meaning out of its visual and plastic aspects. Overall, image and plasticity have the same saliency as writing and must be considered in conjunction with each other.

In the previous sections, I offered an interpretation of the content of typescript based on the rewriting by Ricci and Santangelo since a comparison between them suggests that this latter provides an accurate version of the original storyline. I argued that *Terra matta* is an autobiography with a literacy narrative running through it. *Terra matta* focusses on Rabito's hardships, Italian history and his marriage; representations of language

acquisition and literacy are important but sporadic. However, if we interpret the typescript as an image and a 3D object *first*, the literacy narrative takes centre stage because I see and feel books, semicolons, a typewriter, the shape of letters and, if I am familiar with how Rabito called the typescript, I see "quaterni" (school notebooks) as well.

These elements have something in common. They are all metonymies of a schooled individual and of someone who is well-versed in essay-text literacy. Books are print objects which have long been used to teach literacy and to educate. A "quaterno" is an essential part of pupil's classroom kit. The typewriter was an Olivetti Lettera 22, which was back then the most advanced writing technology available on the market; moreover, it was the one that Giovanni had used to type his poetry (Fragapane 2017: n.p.). The semicolon is one of the most difficult punctuation marks to teach and to master because its function stands halfway between the comma and the full stop. One can use either the comma or the full stop to do the job of a semicolon. It is also possible to write correctly without it. Therefore, we are more likely to find semicolons in the higher-order uses of literacy, such as essays, academic writing and newspaper articles.

To understand why Rabito made a 3D collage of visual and tactile metonymies, we must turn to Rabito's "interest". Rabito was born poor and was an unschooled autodidact, but when he composed what then became *Terra matta*, he was doing what all writers of autobiography do: he was representing the self and he was doing so in relation to literacy. Rabito saw himself as a writer and as someone who could master essay-text literacy, a literacy practice that people normally acquire through years of schooling. Nevertheless, he lived at a time where literacy followed from formal education and class and where he was labelled as "inafabeto" by institutions, his wife and, quite possibly, also people around him. Furthermore, he associated the educated and the rich with deception and dishonesty. Therefore, instead of using words, he self-represented via visual and plastic metonymies. The metonymies express the same ideas that are expressed by the literacy narrative contained in *Terra matta.* There is coherence and unity between the typescript, its style and its content, not incoherence and error as the reception suggests.

What remains to be established is whether Rabito's self-definition as literate is something that he felt but he did not dare put into words because of social constraints and lack of suitable vocabulary, or if he chose not to use written words to tease the reader. In other words, do the metonymies compensate for a lack of words and concepts or are they

an intentional riddle which tests how we define literacy and illiteracy? Rabito's outstanding ability to manipulate language and his resourcefulness as learner suggest that he would have been capable of inventing words and concepts expressing how he perceived himself and his literacy proficiency. However, he also knew that if he had written down that he was literate nobody would have believed him. This lends support to the thesis that the typescript may well be a carefully orchestrated 3D riddle meant to unsettle deeply rooted conceptualisations of literacy and illiteracy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied the literacy narrative approach to Vincenzo Rabito's autobiography. Rabito was born poor, did not go to school and taught himself to read and write when he was fifteen. He typed his autobiography on a typewriter using an invented and ungrammatical idiolect which mixes Italian and Sicilian; he put an interpunct between every word and consistently disregarded the conventions of prose writing (e.g. title, subdivisions into paragraphs and chapters). *Terra matta* has by and large been received as a text by an illiterate on account of Rabito's lack of formal schooling and the idiosyncrasies of the typescript.

The lens of the literacy narrative approach has highlighted a literacy narrative within *Terra matta* which reframes how we view Rabito and the typescript. Via the literacy narrative approach, Rabito becomes a resourceful learner familiar with essay-text literacy while the typescript becomes a multimodal 3D riddle which encourages us to reflect on how we define literacy and illiteracy. Overall, my analysis of Rabito's language learning experiences and of the materiality of the typescript encourages us to *always* question the label "illiterate", especially when it is used in the context of the publishing industry. My analysis also shows that literacy narratives that function as a subgenre can play a crucial role in the economy of the text although they may be of secondary importance in relation to other aspects and themes.

CONCLUSION: TRANSFORMING THE LITERACY NARRATIVE APPROACH

This thesis began with the story of Victor of Aveyron as narrated in *De l'éducation d'un homme sauvage* (1801/2012) by Jean Itard, the doctor who, by means of language and literacy lessons, attempted to restore Victor's ability to participate in society after eight years in the wilderness without human contact. I began with Victor's story because it relates directly to the central concerns of this thesis: highlighting the occurrence of literacy narratives and the extent to which literacy narratives can alter how we look at language acquisition, literacy and, by extension, language. In literacy narratives, language and literacy are part of a large multimodal communicative landscape where they compete with other semiotic modes for dominance. Literacy narratives, in other words, are about conflicts stemming from different ways of communicating.

This is an idea that is not normally associated with literacy narratives. Literacy narratives tend to be interpreted via theoretical frameworks that stress the (putative) transformative and identitarian powers of language and literacy and that overlook the incidence of multimodality. Itard painstakingly tried to transform Victor into a literate language user because he believed that language and literacy had the power to give a "savage" agency in society. *L'enfant sauvage* (1969), Truffaut's cinematographic adaptation of Itard's book, uses the same framework. Although Victor will never learn to speak fluently, let alone read and write (Newton 2002: 125), the ending misleadingly suggests that the boy may be transformed by language and literacy. The final take features Itard telling Victor, after he had attempted to escape back to the forest, "Tantôt nous reprenderons les exercices" (We will resume the language practice soon) (1969: 1h 20' 00"). In Truffaut's film, language's and literacy's powers are preserved.

The researchers involved in the case of Genie – a modern-day feral child who had sustained years of isolation, imprisonment, physical and mental abuse – drew from Truffaut's film for inspiration (Newton 2002: 216-217). Susan Curtiss, a young postgraduate writing a PhD on childhood language acquisition, was tasked with Genie's language instruction. Curtiss believed that language is the essence of humanity and tested the girl "for her grammar, for her phonemes, for 'simple negation', 'simple modification (one adjective + one noun),' and so forth" (Curtiss in Stuckey 1991: 81). Like Victor, Genie

resisted Curtiss's lessons: "Testing [Genie] was often extremely problematic and difficult" (Curtiss in Stuckey 1991: 81). But, like Itard, Curtiss persevered. She learned how to "work around her [Genie's] moods, to motivate her, and to get her to perform" (Curtiss in Stuckey 1991: 81).

As Elspeth Stuckey has argued in her assessment of Genie's (and, we could add, of Victor's) education: "Remarkable is the immutable reverence with which the idea of language is treated; the standard of language persists as though there were no other standards" (1991: 82). Reverence for language, literacy and language acquisition have held sway in literary criticism. This, in turn, has resulted in approaches that address literacy narratives monomodally, that is, only through the analytics of language and/or literacy. To change this, to interpret literacy narratives differently, requires a conscious and programmatic effort of the mind. In Chapter 1, therefore, I put forward the "literacy narrative approach", a new theoretical framework specifically geared to identifying and probing conflicts between semiotic modes.

This approach centres on the importance of ideology and history for interpretation. Using a historically contextualised approach allows us to start from the premise that semiotic modes are extra-textual phenomena and, consequently, that we should carefully situate the text and draw on historical studies of literacy, language and communication when interpreting. An ideologically informed approach frames the transformative role that critics have accorded to language as contingent, contextually determined, and invites us to examine power struggles between modes in the text instead. Alongside history and ideology, the literacy narrative approach I have developed uses a set of transferable tools – the operating metaphors for the teaching of literacy, the competing logics of the literacy narrative, the regionalising of literacy. These tools provide the critic and the student of literature with points of discussion since they can help determine the role of literacy and language acquisition in the text.

In the central chapters of the thesis, I applied the literacy narrative approach to three contemporary literacy narratives and argued that it allows for revised interpretations because the critic can draw on a broader set of concepts which have not yet been explored. Moreover, each practical application puts forward and develops further concepts which can be transferred across the various literacy narratives. In Chapter 2, through a discussion of Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory,* I suggested that language can be viewed as a "multimodal"

semiotic mode which can be refracted into the modes of speech, writing, image, sound and "music". I put forward the idea that linguistic variety and hierarchies stem not only from national/natural languages but also from "literacy practices". I also argued that Rodriguez sets up a conflict between two practices – "essay-text literacy" (a school- and print-based practice) and "the oral mode" (a sound- and speech-based practice) – and that it traces differences between them to class divides. In Chapter 3, through a discussion of Marani's *Nuova grammatica finlandese* and by drawing upon Anderson's notion of print-capitalism, I reprised the concept of essay-text literacy. I suggested that its dominance originates from the endorsement of powerful institutions (the nation-state, the education system, printers, publishers) and that although it facilitates mutual understanding, it brings about a loss of semiotic resources for meaning-making. Essay-text literacy privileges print and writing in standard language to the detriment of sonic modes, image and bodily gestures. In Chapter 4, Rabito's *Terra matta* became a catalyst for a discussion of the implications that literacy practices have for conceptualisations of literacy and illiteracy and for the figure of the "illiterate" writer. This chapter illustrated the ways in which the publishing industry and cultural institutions fetishise this figure to reinforce the dominance of essay-text literacy and to uphold firm distinctions between literacy and illiteracy, social classes and literary genres. Chapters 3 and 4 also engaged with the materiality of the text to exemplify how this can also be discussed via the lens of the literacy narrative approach.

Alongside the notions of literacy practices, multimodality within language, the loss of meaning-making resources and the figure of the "illiterate" writer, the applications have provided a variety of ways of conceptualising the figure of the language learner in literature. Rarely do language learners experience the (putative) transformative power of language and literacy in an unmediated way due to the ideological dimension of language and literacy practices. For Rodriguez, learning English and essay-text literacy was a painful imposition which he resisted at first but which turned out to be his life vocation and a fulfilling career as a scholar and a writer; English made Rodriguez's mother the head of her household but essay-text literacy caused her to be demoted; for Rodriguez's father, English meant the loss of his authority in the family. For Sampo, essay-text literacy was an initiation into nationalism and a source of *angst* so unbearable that he killed himself. For Rabito, it was something that he deeply desired and for which he had a flair but that he could not easily attain because of the "desonesto coverno" and his social class; for Vito, Rabito's friend, it

was irrelevant because it did not feed his children. (For Victor and Genie, it was yet another form of abuse.)

The interpretations produced via the application of the literacy narrative approach invite us to reconsider the status of language acquisition and literacy in literature. More specifically, they suggest that the language- and literacy-related power structures that characterise social life play out in literature as well. But they also suggest the reverse, namely, that literacy narratives can help us pinpoint and define what these power structures may be. The applications, in other words, frame the literacy narrative approach as a new and valuable framework that resonates with, say, Marxist, Feminist and Postcolonial literary theories. While Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism focus on representations of class, gender and race respectively because they are considered key aspects of subject formation and of literature, the literacy narrative approach provides a paradigm for systematically addressing equally important aspects of subject formation and literature, namely, language, language acquisition and literacy.

Although the practical applications can be said to have staked out a new area of research within literary criticism, they have limitations which should be highlighted to guide further research and to test the purview of the literacy narrative approach. Firstly, they suggest that representations of essay-text literacy are a staple of literacy narratives. However, I have only focussed on fiction and autobiography written in the West in the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, on alphabetic texts, and on male authors. Although scholarship on literary representations of language acquisition and literacy is based on autobiography and fiction, we can find literacy narratives in poetry as well. O'Sullivan has identified contemporary German poems which contain literacy narratives (2014: 260); Seamus Heaney's "Alphabets" (1987) describes a boy's first encounter with the alphabet and the classroom and can be defined as a poem belonging the genre of the literacy narrative. Furthermore, in this thesis, we have encountered *Dictée* (1982), a semi-autobiographical novel by a Korean-American female (Theresa Hak Kyung Cha) which mixes different scripts, and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/2010), an eighteenth-century novel in which the literacy narrative function as a subgenre. Therefore, future research could examine if a change of genre, era, geographical area, gender, or script alters the role that essay-text literacy has in the text. In other words, is the concept of essay-text literacy transferrable? Does its role change when we interpret a literacy narrative written prior to the nineteenth-

century mass literacy campaigns? Does it change when the narrative draws from, or is written in, a script that has a different history, different multimodality and different affordances (e.g. a script which represents sounds graphically as letters, as the Roman alphabet does, *vs.* a script that represents meaning as image, as logographic and pictographic scripts do [Kress 2003: 141])?

Secondly, my discussions of *Nuova grammatica finlandese* and of *Terra matta* raise the issue of the relation between essay-text literacy and translation, understood as a textual process involving a source and a target text. In *Nuova grammatica finlandese,* Friari's rewriting of Sampo's memoir is also a translation that can be classified both as intersemiotic (involving a multimodal source text rendered via a linguistic target text) and "domesticating", a term coined by translation scholar Lawrence Venuti in the context of interlingual translation (1995/2008). "Domesticating translation" refers to a target text that privileges "the current standard dialect of the translating language" (1995/2008: 19) over nonstandard forms and stylistic experimentalism. What can be said of Friari's rewriting can also be said of Ricci and Santangelo's rewriting of Rabito's typescript since they erased the visual valence of the semicolon and brought it into line with normative practices. We might therefore want to rethink the links between translation and the literacy narrative through the lens of multimodality.

Lastly, the literacy narrative approach and the practical applications paint a very bleak, almost Foucauldian, picture of language acquisition and literacy. Language acquisition and literacy are controlled by powerful institutions, they can be traumatic, they subdivide human beings into "literate" and "illiterate", they produce and reinforce social inequalities. However, there are literacy narratives that offer a different, more positive, picture. For instance, in *Always Running La Vida Loca*: *Gang Days in L.A.* (1993), the poet and writer Luis J. Rodriguez narrates how literature and education released him from his front-line involvement in East Los Angeles gang warfare. In *Lives on The Boundary* (1989), which, as its subtitle suggests, is "*A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educational Underclass"*, Mike Rose draws on his own experience as a student of remedial English courses and (later on) as a composition teacher to describe the aspirations and capabilities of students who have wrongly been labelled as "illiterate".

It could, therefore, be argued that the bleak picture offered here is reductive. Nevertheless, as explained in the Introduction, the literacy narrative approach draws from

Freire's pedagogy and, in particular, from his concept of "*coscientização*", a form of critical thinking which enables people to identify social inequalities and contradictions and to take action against them (Ramos in Freire 1970/1996: 17; Freire 1970/1996: 85). Freire believed that positive changes in society take place if they are preceded by an understanding of the dynamics that bring about social inequalities. In other words, critical awareness is a prerequisite for change. The literacy narrative approach and the readings produced here are tools that foster critical awareness of the ideological dimension of literacy and language acquisition. Consequently, they should be seen as inherently constructive and as a necessary step towards a more positive conceptualisation and practice of literacy and language education.

Given this characteristic, the literacy narratives can be applied to texts such as *Always Running la Vida Loca* and *Lives on the Boundary* and could help formulate concepts which frame language acquisition, literacy, the classroom and, even, essay-text literacy as engines of transformation and fulfilment. However, the formulation of such concepts should always be consistent with the foundations of the approach. Put differently, it should always acknowledge that, in literature as in real life, language acquisition and literacy are tied to ideology and history and that we should not mythicise them as magical transformative and identitarian agents which can act independently of the other factors that shape subject formation. In this thesis, I have stressed the negative vein of literacy narratives because this is seldom accorded the attention that it deserves, because we need concepts and vocabulary to articulate it and because it encourages us to reflect more broadly on the reasons why writers write literacy narratives and why we use, learn and teach language and literacy. Nevertheless, there are many more aspects to explore that may add to the epistemological potential of the literacy narrative.

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